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Successful insurgent revolutions in Latin America: analysis of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School



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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**SUCCESSFUL INSURGENT REVOLUTIONS IN LATIN
AMERICA: ANALYSIS OF THE CUBAN AND
NICARAGUAN REVOLUTIONS**

by

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March 2014

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**SUCCESSFUL INSURGENT REVOLUTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA: ANALYSIS
OF THE CUBAN AND NICARAGUAN REVOLUTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis is to explore the factors that led to the success of two Latin American revolutions in Cuba (1959) and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (1979). While insurgent movements have proliferated in Latin America since the Spanish “conquest,” these are the only two that, in the post-World War II era, have taken power by overthrowing the incumbent regimes by force of arms. Understanding the most prominent factors that led to the success of these revolutions will aid in identifying the potential for success of current and future insurgents.

This thesis hypothesizes that the four critical factors that contributed to the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions are leadership (strategy), popular support (the ability of the insurgents to assemble a popular constituency for their message and program), external factors (degree of support in the international environment), and military impact (the personalistic, repressive, corrupt, and unprofessional armed forces). In other words, an analysis of these four factors as they relate to both revolutions will provide the best critical approaches to explain success.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARC	Agrupacion Revolucionario de Cuba
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COIN	counterinsurgency
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional
GNR	Government for National Reconstruction
HN	host nation
IED	improvised explosive device
IO	Information Operations
M-26-7	Movimiento 26 de Julio
NCO	non-commissioned officer
OAS	Organization of American States
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened.
These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.

Luke 21: 9

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. IMPORTANCE

The intention of this thesis is to explore the factors that led to the success of two Latin American revolutions in Cuba (1959) and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (1979). While insurgent movements have proliferated in Latin America since the Spanish “conquest,” these are the only two that, in the post-World War II era, have taken power by overthrowing the incumbent regimes by force of arms. Understanding the most prominent factors that led to the success of these revolutions will aid in identifying the potential for success of current and future insurgents. This thesis will seek to answer the following questions: First, why did the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions succeed in seizing power? Second, while recognizing that these revolutionary successes were contingent events, are there factors that persist in the political, economic, and social environments in Latin America that might cause similar upheaval in the future?

In the past decade, the United States and its allies have had to confront insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, while providing security assistance to other countries confronted by insurrectionary movements.¹ Unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, however, U.S. intervention in Latin America post-Vietnam has been of the “small footprint” variety. This was most notably the case in El Salvador (1979–1992) and Colombia since 1999, and is likely to remain the method of intervention in the future. Therefore, by studying these two insurgent successes in that region, one can better understand the strategic environment and the contingent circumstances of each so as better to craft policies and strategies to preempt or curtail insurgent threats to regional stability.

The Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions have become part of a narrative of insurgent success that inspires some revolutionaries and Latin American political militants even today. The Cuban Revolution especially is a fading if tarnished symbol of

¹ Colombia, Philippines, Mali, and some others.

leftist triumph. The survival of these revolutions despite or even because of the opposition of the United States, demonstrate that the leadership won for both revolutions a modicum of domestic and international legitimacy. Politically, both countries transformed from a right leaning political regime to a leftist regime, but used very different strategies. Each recast the economic foundations of their country—economic policies in Cuba changed drastically with the nationalization of major industries and the curtailment of ties with the United States. In Nicaragua, on the other hand, while the Sandinistas were also at loggerheads with the Reagan administration, which actively tried to overthrow them, the regime sought to diversify their economy and become less dependent on limited trading partners while promoting private investments. In fact, after the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, Fidel Castro advised them not to be too radical in their revolution. He further advised them not to make the same mistakes he had made, to allow private enterprises in their country to grow the economy, and to be tolerant of multi-party politics.²

Both countries also reorganized their militaries to fit regime political ideology. For the Cubans, conservative officers and soldiers were removed from the ranks or self-exiled. An estimated 550 personnel were executed who were alleged supporters of the Batista regime and/or were accused of murder and torture.³ In the case of Nicaragua, the National Guard was completely “destroyed and replaced by a new armed forces that was ‘explicitly Sandinist.’”⁴ Ultimately, both militaries, led by radical revolutionary commanders, immediately became a mainstay of their respective regimes.⁵

A study of the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions can provide insights specific to Latin America, which may help to orient current and future policy options and security assistance approaches in the region.

² William R. Long, “Radicalism Not Necessary, Castro Advises Sandinistas” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1985, http://articles.latimes.com/1985-01-13/news/mn-8685_1_castro-advises-sandinistas.

³ James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁵ *Ibid.*

B. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS

Understanding the reasons for the success of these two insurgencies, and whether those factors might emerge in other Latin American countries, can help to inform U.S. policy in the region. In this study, I hypothesize that the four critical factors that contributed to the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions were

- leadership (strategy),
- popular support (the ability of the insurgents to assemble a popular constituency for their message and program)
- external factors (degree of support in the international environment), and
- military impact (the personalistic, repressive, corrupt, and unprofessional armed forces).

In other words, an analysis of these four factors as they relate to both revolutions will provide the best critical approaches to explain success.

1. Critical Factors in an Insurgent Revolution

a. Leadership

Leadership in both the government and the insurgency plays a critical role in the success or failure of a revolution. The Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) "Guide to Analysis of Insurgency 2012" explains that "an ideal insurgent leader displays charisma, the flexibility to balance ideology with the need to be inclusive and leverage local grievances, and an ability to engender loyalty and maintain group unity."⁶ All three of the Cuban Revolution's insurgent leaders—Fidel and Raul Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara—proved instrumental to the success of the insurgency by displaying these characteristics, as did Carlos Fonseca, Daniel and Humberto Ortega, and Eden Pastora in Nicaragua. The insurgent leaders are extremely important to their causes because they provide vision, direction, guidance, coordination, organization, and planning for the movement. They are the "idea people" who, through their charismatic personalities, power the revolution and orchestrate guerrilla military efforts.⁷

⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, (U.S. Government, 2012), <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=713599>, 10.

⁷ *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, https://www.armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24x2.pdf, 2-3, 2-5.

In the same manner, an effective incumbent government could thwart the efforts of insurgents by understanding the situation and implementing effective reforms and measured repression. Properly selecting the institution and the “willingness and ability of the government leaders to act decisively and authoritatively and to compel all elements of the state power... to work toward a common purpose are the clearest signs of effective government leadership.”⁸ While it would be going too far to argue in the manner of Edward Lansdale that all one had to do is find a Ramon Magsaysay (President of the Philippines) to succeed, it is equally true that the unpopularity of the incumbent governments in Cuba and Nicaragua were the major reason for the success of both revolutions. Cuban President Fulgencio Batista failed to crush Castro’s forces in the Sierra Maestra Mountains because his military was corrupt and inept. Like Batista, the regime of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza Jr. was brutal and corrupt, which undermined the ability of his *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) to conduct a successful counterinsurgency. Although the Nicaraguan National Guard was well trained and equipped, counterinsurgency tactics applied in a political vacuum were bound to fail. The corruption and repression, as noted by the U.S. Army’s “Tactics in Counterinsurgency” manual (FM 3-24.2), “can lead to popular dissatisfaction with the current government. Rampant corruption leads to the loss of HN [host nation] legitimacy and possibly a desire to change or replace the Host Nation government.”⁹

b. Popular Support

According to the CIA’s report on analyzing insurgencies, “insurgents generally rely on the civilian population for food, medicine, shelter, or intelligence—provided either voluntarily or under duress.”¹⁰ Well-organized insurgencies typically treat the civilian population well for this same reason. In order for them to be effective against a superior army, “the rebel forces must have civilians’ active aid, not just their passive acquiescence.”¹¹

⁸ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 12.

⁹ *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24.pdf, 1-18.

¹⁰ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 11.

¹¹ Chalmers A. Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 149.

In the case of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, a combination of the insurgent's good public relations along with government corruption and oppression significantly contributed to the eventual outcomes. Popular support for the insurgency is rooted in the basis of the population's grievances. The U.S. Army categorizes the populace's grievances under five broad categories: identity, region, occupation or exploitation, economic failure, and, finally, corruption and repression.¹² The government or the insurgency can capitalize on these grievances to promote their agenda and gain legitimacy through popular support. Both Fidel Castro and Carlos Fonseca marketed an image of a charismatic national savior in the romantic tradition of Simón Bolívar to enlist popular support and to promote their cause abroad. At the same time, the increase in popular support for the insurgency in both cases led the government leaders, Fulgencio Batista and Anastasio Somoza, to increase their violence against the population, which only swelled the popularity of the insurgent alternative.

c. External Influence

Government and the insurgency could have had external assistance, both “hard” and “soft,” from foreign actors such as other states, religious groups, and opposition groups. Natural catastrophes may contribute to economic downturns that influence the political environment. External support could consist of “diplomatic, financial, arms, nonlethal equipment, sanctuary, intelligence, training, or advisers—enhancing the political or military operations of the recipient.”¹³ Three root causes for insurgencies recognized by the U.S. Army's “Tactics In Counterinsurgency” manual fall squarely under the category of external influences: religious groups, occupiers (foreign nations), and economic failure.¹⁴

In the cases of both the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, the insurgents and the government found external support. The U.S. government supported both state dictators through economic and military aid. At the same time, Washington's continued and direct

¹² *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24.pdf, 1-17 – 1-18.

¹³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 15.

¹⁴ *Tactics in Counterinsurgency FM 3-24.2*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24.pdf, 1-17 – 1-18. The specific reference to religious groups is defined as (domestic or international) fundamentalism or extremism, which could become a root cause of an insurgency in and of itself.

support of both governments also helped to undermine their legitimacy. Both dictators were denounced as U.S. puppets, which served to fuel the opposition's support. Additionally, in both cases, the pressure by the U.S. government on the regimes' leaders to step-down contributed to the insurgent victories.

d. Military Factor

Barrington Moore noted that "it is the state of the army, of competing armies... that has determined the fate of twentieth-century revolutions."¹⁵ The state's success or failure against an insurgency depends on the military's "morale, competence of command, training, equipment, and intelligence."¹⁶ While the military does not necessarily need to take the lead in combating the insurgent threat inside a nation, in the example of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, they played the prime role in counterinsurgency. Batista's poor management of the Cuban army undermined its morale. Somoza's inability to reign-in the corruption and brutality of the National Guard amplified their unpopularity and undermined his legitimacy. Both militaries lacked a professional officer corps required to meet their responsibilities of managing violence and securing their client society. In both cases, military professionalism was severely lacking, the civil-military tension was at its highest, and corruption transformed the military into a branch of the regime's spoils system, all of which contributed to its failure against an under-equipped insurgency.¹⁷

As alluded to by Barrington Moore, insurgent military forces are equally as important to the triumph of the revolution. Guerrilla movements must have sufficient armed capacity to endure, outlast military repression, and confront them head-on in order for a revolutionary transfer of power to occur. In fact, the destruction of the insurgent's

¹⁵ Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 43.

¹⁶ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 140.

¹⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. (Cambridge, NY: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 15.

military “rather than loss of legitimacy wrecked most guerrilla movements.”¹⁸ It is therefore possible to argue that success or failure of a revolutionary movement ultimately comes down to their ability to field reasonably efficient military forces.¹⁹

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the process of understanding major contributing factors of a revolution’s success, many authors have identified prominent theories about revolutions that help explain their outcomes. James DeFronzo, author of *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, identifies and discusses five theories, which are generally accepted in this field of study—Marxist theory, frustration-aggression theory, systems theory, modernization theory, and structural theory.²⁰ For instance, Marifeli Pérez-Stable, author of *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, notes that, “Most Cubanists have implicitly adhered to the premises of modernization theory.”²¹ DeFronzo also identifies five factors that are critical to the success of revolutionary movements: mass frustration, elite dissidence, unifying motivation, state crisis, and a permissive world context.²²

Charles Tilly, in *From Mobilization to Revolution*, underscores the importance that a dual power struggle has on the “revolutionary situation” through his theory of mobilization. He argues that the government is no longer unchallenged and that an opposition directly challenges its sovereignty by providing directives to the populace. Tilly goes as far as to say that if there is no dual power, there is no revolution.²³ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, author of *Exploring Revolution*, directly challenges and disagrees

¹⁸ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 50; Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

¹⁹ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 211–216.

²⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 22–26.

²¹ Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12.

²² DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 22.

²³ Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 190–211.

with Tilly because, as he describes it, “dual power is not a necessary precursor to that joint change of both polity and society that we call revolution.”²⁴

Jeff Goodwin, author of *No Other Way Out*, posits that revolutionary movements do not need to be strictly in response to “economic exploitation or inequality, but also and more directly a response to political oppression and violence.”²⁵ The political oppression and violence are brought about by the state. Therefore, Goodwin identifies the state-centered theory of revolution. He favors this theory because “the success or failure of revolutionary movements depends more fundamentally upon the nature of the specific states that revolutionaries have sought to overthrow.”²⁶ Regardless of the theory being discussed, four resounding factors fill the backdrops of revolution theories and provide a consistent theme when researching the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions: leadership, popular support, external influences, and military impact.

1. Critical Factors in an Insurgent Revolution

a. Leadership

From a government leadership perspective, the actions taken by state leaders play a critical role in revolutionary movement outcomes. According to Goodwin, “States [leaders] that regulate, reform or even abolish perceived economic and social injustices are less likely to become the target of political demand (revolutionary or otherwise) than those that are seen to cause or perpetuate such injustices.”²⁷ On the other hand, he also notes that authoritarian leaders who exercise repressive and exclusionary actions against any sector of the population encourage and facilitate revolution.²⁸ Specifically, Wickham-Crowley wrote that Batista’s campaign of terror sealed alliances between peasants in the Sierra Maestra and Fidel Castro’s guerrilla movement.²⁹ Likewise,

²⁴ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 166.

²⁵ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁹ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 92–93.

Walter LaFeber argues that Somoza's corruption and injustices added to the populace's frustrations.³⁰ Theda Skocpol adds to the state leadership argument by noting that a proto-bureaucratic state is highly vulnerable to revolution because it gains the bulk of their revenue by taxing the peasantry and providing tax-exemptions for elites.³¹

Wickham-Crowley coins the term *mafiacracies* to describe both the Cuban and Nicaraguan regimes during their revolutions. Mafiacracies "showed themselves to be especially vulnerable to a guerilla resistance which converted itself into a mass revolution against an eventually isolated dictatorship."³²

The revolutionary guerrilla leaders took advantage of circumstances created by poor leadership and management in the government to gain impetus for their movement. Wickham-Crowley identified the pact established by Fidel Castro and the peasant anti-eviction army displeased with Batista's regime in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.³³ LaFeber, DeFronzo, Goodwin, and Wickham-Crowley all identified similar grievance-inspired alliances in Nicaragua's Revolution.

b. Popular Support

Revolutionary movements require some degree of popular acquiescence to succeed. Three of the five factors that DeFronzo identifies as critical to the success of revolutionary movements are directly related to popular support: mass frustration, elite dissidence, and unifying motivation. He also notes that the popular dissatisfaction across all social groups contributed to the demise of both Batista's Cuban regime and Somoza's government in Nicaragua.³⁴

³⁰ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, expanded ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 228–229.

³¹ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 48.

³² Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 212.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 15, 22.

Wickham-Crowley argues that, to succeed, revolutionaries must muster support across the social spectrum.³⁵ DeFronzo plainly posits that, “for a revolution to triumph, several classes must join forces.”³⁶ Furthermore, most analysts of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions agree that mass popular support was mainly due to the exclusionary and repressive regimes of Batista and Somoza.

Goodwin posits that during the Cuban Revolution the popular support shifted from anti-radicalism to anti-Batista. He also states that Castro was able to gain popular support by taking advantage of Batista’s failures.³⁷ DeFronzo identifies uneven distribution of wealth, lack of services in the rural areas, and unemployment caused by Batista’s corruption as reasons why Castro was able to gain broad popular sympathy for his guerrilla movement (M-26-7).³⁸ The shift of popular support to the Nicaraguan guerrilla force (FSLN), much like in Cuba, experienced its biggest increase near the fall of the dictatorial regime.

For Thomas C. Wright, Somoza’s repressive Special Antiterrorist Activity Brigade, responsible for dealing with the insurgency, targeted peasants, workers, and slum dwellers, who it assumed were supporting the guerrillas.³⁹ The intensification of terror against the population by the government only served to gather further support for the FSLN. Humberto Ortega, minister of Defense for the Sandinista government and lauded guerrilla fighter, perhaps disingenuously insisted that repression preceded the insurgency, rather than flowed from it. “We couldn’t say ‘no’ to the insurrection. The mass movement was ahead of the vanguard’s capacity to lead it. We couldn’t oppose that mass movement, that current. We had to put ourselves at the front of the current [al frente de ese río] in order to more or less direct and channel it.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 154–161.

³⁶ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 14.

³⁷ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 62.

³⁸ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 198.

³⁹ Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, Rev ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 171.

⁴⁰ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 186.

c. External Influence

While the conclusion of a revolution—be it a success or failure—is determined by domestic outcomes, external influences can have a decisive sway. Both DeFronzo and Goodwin note that other nations or foreign officials can have a determining effect on the outcome of a revolution. DeFronzo plainly states that “a revolutionary movement in one nation that appears to be overcoming the national government might be suppressed, at least temporarily, by other nations opposed to the success of the revolution.”⁴¹ John Dunn gives considerably more credit to the absence of significant and effective counterinsurgency assistance to the government. Assistance, particularly in the last two years for the Cuban Revolution, is “perhaps even a necessary condition” to its success or failure.⁴²

A common theme among many analysts (Wickham-Crowley, LaFeber, Perez-Stable, DeFronzo, and Wright) is that the United States played a major role in both the creation and outcome of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions. Wickham-Crowley notes that the habitual pattern of direct political and military intervention in both countries resulted in weak domestic parties. He states that the history of U.S. intervention provided an opening to authoritarian regimes—*mafiaocracy*—because Washington preferred stability over a legitimate democracy.⁴³

As Perez-Stable explains, one of the pillars that led to radical nationalization in Cuba, which promoted anti-Batista sentiment, was the concern over national sovereignty. National sovereignty was a major concern for the Cuban people because United States corporations owned most of the national wealth.⁴⁴ LaFeber and DeFronzo also comment on the significant effect the Alliance for Progress—a U.S. program that aimed at raising Latin American living standards in the 1960s—had on the Nicaraguan Revolution. Both

⁴¹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 17; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 37.

⁴² John Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 202.

⁴³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 212.

⁴⁴ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 5.

state that the program inadvertently resulted in more revolts because it raised expectations among the populace that these governments were unwilling or unable to meet.⁴⁵

Conversely, Goodwin isolates the importance of how the inactions of foreign nations can have on the revolution's outcome—particularly when the regime has a “foreign sponsor.”⁴⁶ Wickham-Crowley adds that nations who do not intervene, or do not intercede to prevent the government's downfall play an important role in the outcome of the revolution: “During the Cuban Revolution of 1956–1958 and the Nicaraguan... revolution[s] of 1978–1979, no nation sent military forces to save the internationally despised regimes of Batista, [and] Somoza.”⁴⁷

Wright, Defonzo, Perez-Stable, Anthony James Joes (author of *Victorious Insurgencies*) and Tad Szulc (author of *Fidel: A Critical Portrait*) convey that the United State's inaction toward the M-26-7, the condemnation of Batista, the arms embargo, and the U.S.' request for Batista to step aside as leader all played a crucial role at the end of the revolution.⁴⁸ Joes quotes Earl T. Smith (U.S. ambassador to Cuba between 1957–1959) conceding, “There can be no doubt that the decision by the State Department to suspend the shipment of arms to Cuba was the most effective step taken by the Department of State in bringing about the downfall of Batista.”⁴⁹ DeFronzo, LaFeber, and Wright also agree that the United States played a significant role in Somoza's demise by reducing military aid, publicly condemning his actions, and publicly stating that Nicaragua would be better off without him.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 163; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 212.

⁴⁶ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 49.

⁴⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 17–18.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 14–16; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; Anthony James Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 161.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 157–160.

⁵⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232–233; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 172–175.

In addition to the United State's influence on the outcome of the revolution in Nicaragua, LaFeber and DeFronzo also identify other external actors that significantly contributed to the outcomes: aid to the revolutionaries by neighboring Latin American countries (Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama), the oil crisis in the 1970s, the Roman Catholic Church and liberation theology, the 1972 earthquake that devastated Managua, the media—specifically the killing of news reporter Bill Steward by the National Guard, and the Organizations of American States (OAS).

d. Military Factor

The military's role in the outcome of a revolution, although not recognized by many authors as being a decisive factor, continues nevertheless to be a common theme contributing to the downfall of the Batista and Somoza dictatorships. Wickham-Crowley suggests that sociologists avoid writing about the military's role because if they "study the military carefully and analytically, their colleagues tend to view them as closet militarists." He further theorizes that a military's solidarity in the face of revolution—their willingness to stay together in defense of the present regime—is a decisive element in the outcome of the revolution.⁵¹

Alain Rouquie theorizes that, "The victories of the guerrilla army in Cuba in 1959 or the popular party-led army in 1979 in Nicaragua can be explained essentially by the collapse of the ruling regimes, and the demoralization of the military."⁵² Wickham-Crowley also explains that where the military "employed terror [against the opposition] *along with* civic attention [to general populace], support for the guerrilla at times simply crumbled."⁵³

Perez-Stable, LaFeber, DeFronzo, Wickham-Crowley, and Goodwin also agree that the corruption and brutality of the Nicaraguan and Cuban militaries contributed the

⁵¹ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 160.

⁵² Alain Rouquié, *The Military and the State in Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 41–42.

⁵³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 50.

success of both revolutions.⁵⁴ Wickham-Crowley more specifically notes that during the campaign against Castro's M-26-7, from 1956 to 1958, the Cuban army's actions consisted more of terrorizing and killing peasants than successful operations against the guerrillas.⁵⁵ The National Guard's repression in Nicaragua, wrote LaFeber, "consisted of rocket-bombing the slums," which resulted in "killing thousands of women and children."⁵⁶

D. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This thesis will employ a historical approach in identifying the critical factors that resulted in the success of both the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions. In order to gain the most insight about these two revolutions, I will examine the insurgent life cycle as defined by the CIA. Understanding the stages of the life cycle and how they would apply to the cases of Cuban and Nicaraguan insurgencies will help provide a better understanding of their outcomes. Furthermore, identifying recognized theories of revolutions will contribute to this thesis by laying the theoretical foundation for studying the M-26-7 and FSLN's success. Additionally, a historical search for dominant factors that contributed to the success of these two revolutionary insurgent groups will help prove or add to my hypothesis.

In order to set a historical background of how Batista, the Somoza family, the M-26-7, and the FSLN rose to power, Chapter III will trace the pertinent events in these two revolutions. This general understanding will help in the analysis of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions in terms of the pre-identified factors: leadership, popular support, external influence, and the military factors.

⁵⁴ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 42, 56–57; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 229; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 204–206, 245–246; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 61–62, 156; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 45, 160.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 233–234.

The historical analysis will draw primarily from secondary sources such as books, country studies of Cuba and Nicaragua, government reports, and scholarly articles that contribute to the overall outcome of both revolutions. Primary sources will be used, to a lesser extent, which will concentrate on people's reactions to the revolutions as they were occurring. Mass media and editorial printed material from the time frames of the revolutions will aid in the historical analysis.

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II. UNDERSTANDING INSURGENT REVOLUTIONS

At its most fundamental level, understanding insurgent revolutions requires a theoretical framework that allows for the formulation of consistent explanations to actual events. Many revolution theorists have crafted theories that allow for a better understanding of past, present, and potential revolutionary uprisings. With a basic understanding of generally accepted theories (presented in this chapter), models have been created to better comprehend insurgent evolution and de-evolution throughout their life cycle. This chapter will progress in this same manner; starting with a discussion of leading theories, followed by the CIA's model of an insurgent's life cycle.

A. THEORIES OF REVOLUTION

It is through theories we can gain a better understanding of human behavior in regards to the hows and whys of individual and communal actions. The attempt at understanding and studying revolutions is an age-old endeavor that has led to the development of theories aimed at explaining every aspect of revolutions. They provide a framework for comprehending historical events and a foundation for future research. In particular, the 1960s and 1970s experienced a significant increase and revision in writings of revolution and political violence. Efforts to devise explanations to revolutions have culminated in five leading theories: Marxist; frustration-aggression; systems; modernization; and structural.⁵⁷ A basic understanding of these prominent theories allows for a deeper appreciation of the leading causes of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.

⁵⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 23–26; theorists that have significantly contributed to the five theories presented in this thesis are Crane Brinton (Clarence Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1965). Lyford P. Edwards (Lyford Paterson Edwards, *The Natural History of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970)., John Foran (John Foran, "Theorizing the Cuban Revolution," *Latin American Perspective* 36, no. 2 (March, 2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27648177>.), Jack A. Goldstone (Jack A. Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 8 (1982), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2945993>, 187–207.), Thomas H. Greene (Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements: Search for Theory and Justice*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Contemporary Comparative Politics, 1990)., and George Sawyer Pettee (George Sawyer Pettee, *The Process of Revolution*. (New York: H. Fertig, 1971).

1. Marxist Theory

In accordance with the Marxist theory, revolutionary conditions are created when the existing oligarchic or “bourgeois” social-political structure and leadership impede economic development of workers and peasants. Karl Marx postulated that economic development or “modes of production” consisted of the progression through six types of “transitional” societies: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism. Revolution is prone to occur during the transition between these societies because of the resulting class struggles. Marx highlights the class conflict that develops between the urban industrial working class (the proletariat) and the ruling capitalist class (the bourgeois) during the period of capitalist industrialization. This theory argues that the importance of working class labor, such as the operation of modern manufacturing machineries, would predictably supersede that of the ownership of capital in the industrialized financial system. Capital is expressed as wealth in terms of resources, investments, money, or the physical means of production.

The government-controlling bourgeois inflames class warfare, born out of the inherent transitions in Marxist theory, when they attempt to maintain a grip on power in the face of increasing demands of the lower classes. The proletariat is driven to revolution by their exploitation and frustration of the capitalist industrial system. According to Jeff Goodwin, “Class struggles may become particularly acute... when the existing mode of production has exhausted its potential for further growth and development and has entered a period of crisis.”⁵⁸ The revolution that develops from this crisis results in armed struggle by the working class aimed at taking over government power in what Marx defines as “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Although the foundational premise of Marx’s theory previously presented remain germane, it has been greatly modified in recent years better to explain revolutionary outbreaks in the Third World.⁵⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, a basic understanding of Marx’s theory of revolution justifies its explanatory power when studying the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 130; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 23–24; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 19–20.

⁵⁹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 23.

2. Frustration-Aggression Theory

The frustration-aggression theory is a psychologically driven approach that attributes revolution to the state of mind of “the masses.” The likelihood that revolution will occur is directly linked with the cognitive state of “deprivation” or “frustration” in relation to a set of goals. It energizes the idea that “misery breeds revolt” by identifying the leading causes of misery or frustration in a populace. It is important to note that a highly oppressive environment alone does not promote revolution under this theory. If misery is generally accepted as a natural part of one’s life, people are not likely to revolt. Economic depression and notable transitions of an economic system are the leading examples that frustration-aggression theorist use to further their beliefs. The rapid deterioration in material living conditions that correspond with sudden economic downturns introduces a wedge between people’s expectations and capacities. The overall decline in the ability to attain the previously established living conditions, in this instance, is not attributed to a change of expectations. James Davis, a leading political revolution theorist, hypothesizes that

revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal.... The crucial factor is the vague or specific fear that ground gained over a long period of time will be quickly lost.... The background for political instability is economic and social progress. A populace in a static socio-economic condition is very unlikely to listen to the trumpet or siren call to rebellion.... Progress in other words is most of the time a necessary but insufficient cause for violent political change.⁶⁰

A specific example that can explain an increase in deprivation occurs when a country is invaded and conquered by another. If the victorious nation decides to exploit the natural and labor resources of the losing country, a downturn in the standard of living may result. This, in turn, could lead the people of the defeated nation to challenge the occupier with violence. The violence toward the victor by the oppressed populace, as a

⁶⁰ Jack A. Goldstone, “Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation,” *World Politics* 32, no. 3 (Apr., 1980), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27648177>, 427; James C. Davies, “Toward a Theory of Revolution,” *American Sociological Review* 27, no. 1 (Feb., 1962), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010111>, 6, 8; Goldstone, *The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions*, 192–194; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 11.

result of drastic changes in social, economic, and political institutions after a war, could grow into a broad-based resistance movement.⁶¹

Another contributor to the gap between the populace's expectations and capabilities includes an increase in expectations without an economic trigger. A shift to increased expectation for a better life without the commensurate improvements can promote frustration, which leads to resentment towards the status quo.⁶² As noted by Jack A. Goldstone in "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolution," "any change in a society that raises people's expectations for a better life without providing the means of meeting those expectations—for example, cultural contacts with more advanced societies, or rapid but uneven economic growth—is likely to be politically destabilizing."⁶³ Specifically, one experience that can raise expectations is communication between people of other societies, where there is a higher standard of living with greater material wealth or where recent revolutions have led to wealth redistribution.⁶⁴

Similarly, a shift in moral authority can initiate change through a newly introduced concept or concepts that challenge the status quo. Some theorists would attribute the intensification within revolutionary movements in parts of Latin America between the 1970s and 1980s to the role of religious leaders and their influence on millions of poor workers and farmers. The shift in the Church's message to help the poor in regards to social justice and redistribution of wealth on the part of a faction of clergy and lay people gave rise to "liberation theology," which contributed to a climate of rising expectations and an environment favorable to change.⁶⁵ Douglas Porch also makes note of this by positing that in the Latin America of the 1950s–1980s, "Liberation Theology

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Goldstone, *The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions*, 192–194; Goldstone, *Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation*, 427–428.

⁶³ Goldstone, *The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions*, 187–207

⁶⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 11–12.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

which mobilized a common Catholic vocabulary against injustice created an intellectual climate conducive to change.”⁶⁶

3. Systems Theory

Systems theory, also referred to as the structural-functionalist theory, views societies as a system where equilibrium must be maintained in order to prevent uprisings. The equilibrium in society is based on the total flow of demands and resources in its environment and its subsystems (polity, economy, status, and culture), which make up its social system. A disturbance in any of the demand and resource flows of a society introduces a “dysfunction” in the social system that stimulates revolution. In other words, “revolution is likely to occur when prerevolutionary social structures fail to perform essential functions, no matter what the cause of such failure might be.”⁶⁷ According to Talcott Parsons, renowned sociologist, in order for a system to survive, it must perform four basic functions:

1. Socialization (“pattern maintenance”): The system must ensure that its values and norms are transmitted to children and immigrants.... Socialization is carried out chiefly through the institutions of the family and formal education, and through daily experiencing of societal norms that define conformity.
2. Adaptation: Adaptation to the environment, including the differentiation and assignment of roles, the distribution of scarce resources, and the anticipation of environmental changes. The roles and norms of economic activity are devoted to meeting this functional need (e.g., markets, central planning institutions, and technological institutes).
3. Goal-attainment: Each actor, group, and subsystem within an integrated social system has one or more goals—for example, businesses seek to make money, churches to win converts, schools to educate students, mothers to protect their children, and armies to win battles—and the system as a whole has goals, for example, in relations to other systems.

⁶⁶ Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 226; Dr. Douglas Porch is a Professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

⁶⁷ Goldstone, *Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation*, 428; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 24.

4. Integration: This prerequisite is fulfilled positively by roles and institutions that perpetuate, assert, or demonstrate the basic values of the system, on which integration is based—for example, the roles and institutions of statesmen, judicial courts of last resort, religious leaders, artists, creative interpreters of the culture, and even social critics. It is also filled negatively through the exercise of authority to control deviancy, regulate conflict, and adjudicate disputes. The ultimate integrative organ of a social system is the state—that is, the institutionalized set of roles entrusted with the authoritative exercise of force.⁶⁸

Although Parsons presents only one way in which a society can be studied as a system, systems theorists mostly agree that the leading aspect that promotes a revolutionary situation is a severe disequilibrium in society. Goldstone surmises that when the system experiences a severe imbalance, “radical ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of the status quo will become widespread. During such a period, any crisis—a war, a government bankruptcy, or a famine—may bring a government down.”⁶⁹

4. Modernization Theory

Similar to the Marxist theory, modernization theory connects the potential for revolution with technological and economic change. The distinction between the two theories is that modernization does not relate revolution to a sequence of economic development stages or define an economic group (class) as the linchpin to revolutionary transformation. James DeFronzo states that, “modernization theory holds that the experience of technological and economic change tends to ‘mobilize’ new or previously apathetic groups by raising both their economic aspirations and their demands for political participation. Revolution is likely to occur when those holding state power are unable or unwilling to meet the demands of groups mobilized by modernization.”⁷⁰

Modernization theorists have different explanations for the linkage of modernization to the development of revolutionary movements. In general, the explanations focus on the differences in the components of society, which “modernize” at

⁶⁸ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 52–54.

⁶⁹ Goldstone, *The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions*, 193.

⁷⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 24.

dissimilar levels. The first explanation, argued by Samuel Huntington, highlights that revolutionary uprisings are caused when a society experiences socio-economic modernization, but the accompanying political modernization and development is lagging behind. Another explanation, influenced more by theorists of psychological motivation, rationalizes that the rapid increases in modernization foster a “revolution of rising expectations.” Much like the frustration-aggression theory, when expectations are not met, widespread “frustration” and a feeling of “deprivation” is prevalent among the populace that encourages the feeling of revolt.⁷¹

The final explanation, linked closely with the systems theory, argues that rapid modernization establishes a form of “disequilibrium” in society that affects its values and social structure. Jeff Goodwin explains that, “rapid modernization destroys the ‘integrative’ institutions that held traditional societies together, creating a sense of meaninglessness (or ‘anomie’) or uncertainty about one’s place in society (or ‘status anxiety’). Revolutionaries, in this view, may become influential in transitional societies because they are able to replace the institutions that modernization undermines.”⁷²

5. Structural Theory

The structural theory of revolution has taken center stage for many revolution theorists. This theory focuses on the structural components of an event in society that is introduced through extraordinary circumstances or obstacles. It posits that revolution is not solely a result of characteristics of a society (values or expectations), “but is in great part dependent on specific objective conditions involving political, economic, and other aspects of social structure.”⁷³ Although this theory, like the Marxist theory, focuses on the importance of structural properties of society, it contains several fundamental differences.

⁷¹ Huntington, Samuel P., Harvard University, Center for International Affairs., *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 265.

⁷² Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 17–18.

⁷³ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 24–25; Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 173.

Unlike the Marxist theory, structural theorists view the state as a product of social organization that utilizes military and administrative functions to maintain social order and competes in the international realm through the use of resources from society. As Theda Skocpol explains in her assessment of internal (state) structural conditions, “administrative and military breakdowns of the autocracies inaugurated a social-revolutionary transformation.... This result was due to the fact that widespread peasant revolts coincided with, indeed took advantage of, the hiatus of government supervision and sanctions.”⁷⁴

Another fundamental difference between the Marxist and structural theories is the inclusion of the international realm. Structural theory takes into account a more global environment when postulating about revolutions. It contributes the conflicts among nations at dissimilar states of technological and economic development to the potential for revolution. With a background on dependency theory, this aspect of the structural theory plainly postulates what Skocpol eloquently explains, namely that “modern social revolutions have happened only in countries situated in disadvantaged positions within international arenas.” This disadvantage ascends from the “internationally uneven spread of capitalist economic development and nation-state formation on a world scale.”⁷⁵

B. INSURGENT LIFE CYCLE

In addition to providing theories, the study of revolution has also allowed for the creation of models to better understand the specifics of each insurgency. While each insurgency is unique in terms of grievance, historical development, social composition, political ideology, leadership and organization, geographical setting and nature, and quality of its opponents, fundamentally insurgency is about weaker actors seeking to overthrow a stronger incumbent. Therefore, in the view of some students of counterinsurgency (COIN), to succeed insurgencies must satisfy certain commonalities of development and pass through common stages to victory. In many respects, this is

⁷⁴ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, 112–113; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 25.

⁷⁵ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, 19–23; Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 174.

simply a cold war counterinsurgent's mirror view of Mao's three stages of insurgency, beginning with weak actors engaged in hit-and-run missions against a stronger opponent while constructing a political, social, and economic base to sustain a revolution. A second attritional stage occurs when the insurgency develops operational parity and a more or less secure territorial base or enclaves to wear down the incumbent power. A final phase occurs when the insurgent achieves operational superiority and is able to overwhelm his opponent in conventional battle. But even counterinsurgents admit that this classic Maoist revolutionary paradigm has occurred only in China in the 1930s and 1940s, and in Indochina (1945–1975). Therefore, because the developments and outcomes of insurgency historically have been far more complex, instead of an ideal linear progression, insurgencies in the classic cold war sense may elect to skip stages, revert to earlier stages in a tactical adjustment, succumb before achieving success, or negotiate to achieve at least some of their goals. Additionally, although a general timeline is represented in Table 1 below, the amount of time to progress through each stage of the life cycle was likely to vary.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 22; The origins of model come from Dr. Gordon McCormick. Dr. McCormick is the Dean of the Graduate School of Operational and Information Sciences at the Naval Postgraduate School and teaches the Guerrilla Warfare Seminar that covers irregular, unconventional, guerrilla, and insurgent warfare. Dr. McCormick briefed the Insurgent Life Cycle to the Central Intelligence Agency during a presentation to the CIA's Insurgency Working Group.

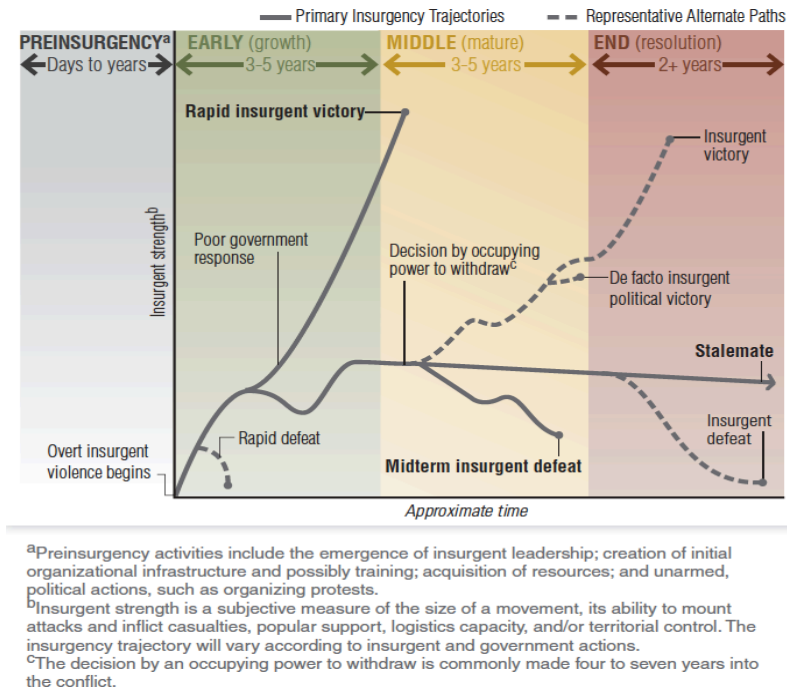


Figure 1. Insurgency Life Cycle⁷⁷

It is of note that this model is considered out of date (and most certainly always was) in an era of “post-modern” insurgencies and terrorist groups like the Taliban, Al Qaeda or Boko Haram. However, as the two insurgencies considered in this thesis took inspiration from “Marxist” or adapted Maoist and quasi-Marxist ideas and blueprints for revolutionary success, and operated at the height of the cold war when this intellectual paradigm was in fashion among both insurgents and counterinsurgents, it provides a useful and historically sensitive framework for analysis.

The four stages identified by the CIA that compose the insurgent life cycle are the preinsurgency stage, the incipient conflict stage, the open insurgency stage, and the resolution stage. As an insurgency progresses through these stages, the actions performed at each stage are continuous and cumulative in nature. The factors in each stage build on each other and remain relevant throughout the life cycle. The dynamic nature of each insurgency allows for separate paths within and between each stage. Each

⁷⁷ Ibid.

of the stages can be driven or shaped by the goals (political or armed conflict) set by the insurgent leadership.

1. Preinsurgency Stage

The preinsurgency stage can be understood as the planning and organizing stage. During this stage, the detection of an insurgency is difficult to determine because the activities of a relatively small group are conducted underground. If actions are performed in the open during this stage, it is minor in scope and usually dismissed by the government as nonviolent if annoying political activity by a minority group or faction. As noted by the United States Army's "Counterinsurgency" manual (FM 3-24), "One common feature of insurgencies is that the government that is being targeted generally takes a while to recognize that an insurgency is occurring. Insurgents take advantage of this time to build strength and gather support."⁷⁸ The assumption here is that the insurgency, assuming that there is to be one, is most vulnerable at this stage and can be "nipped in the bud" by arrests, repression or passing reforms that remove the accumulating grievances. In practice, however, arrests and repression often fall on the wrong groups thus eliminating indigenous competition for true radicals. Reforms cannot be passed because they would undermine the primacy of the ruling group(s), or governments simply do not want to admit that there is a problem, allowing radicals to build their base.

Throughout this stage, the leadership of the insurgency is emerging; the group is forming their identity and publicizing grievances that it hopes will resonate with the targeted population. Recruitment, training, and amassing supplies and arms may also occur during this stage assuming that the insurgents are competent, have the resources and access to outside support, and a long term strategy for success, as opposed to optimistic assumptions that a few bold acts will spark a spontaneous popular uprising, as was the case in Algeria in 1954. The rallying of support for the movement can be based on historical, economic, political, or societal conditions that may enflame discontent

⁷⁸ *Counterinsurgency*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24.pdf, ix.

among a portion of the population.⁷⁹ Some of society's intellectuals may also become articulate and influential advocates for their cause at home and abroad, thus helping to legitimate it.⁸⁰

An insurgent organization may seek further to legitimate itself associating its cause with historical events that have been memorialized in the public mind and bequeathed a legacy of injustice or unfinished business such as an uprising, a government massacre of a group, or a war of independence, and so on. Associating the revolutionary movement with historical figures who have achieved mythological status—Túpac Amaru, Simon Bolivar, Abd el-Kader, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, even eventually Che Guevara, some religious figure or national martyr, the list goes on—is also pretty standard. Revolutionary acts emulating the tradition of these great men is offered by the revolutionaries as the only remedy to current tribulations, which allows the insurgency to gain a following. Regional conflict, particularly when in areas of border disputes or where aggrieved refugees exist in significant numbers, can become an enabling condition for insurgencies. A pool of young, unemployed males (typically 15 to 25 years old) who are unable to marry and face a hopeless future provides a pool of potential recruits for the movement.⁸¹ As noted by Jean Piaget, the life cycle of adolescence divides into distinct psychological stages during which one may be vulnerable to insurgent propaganda that offers plans for world or at least national or group salvation, which could contain messianic ideas that may even slither over into megalomania.⁸² At this stage in the process, discontented groups may arm themselves and establish a safe haven. Insurgents typically occupy remote, inhospitable area where government forces are thin on the ground. Jungles, forests, mountains, deserts or swamps can give insurgents better freedom of movement, a place to hide, as well as bases to train and organize. Regions with porous borders and dense urban areas may also offer sanctuaries.⁸³

⁷⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 5; Harry Eckstein, *Internal War, Problems and Approaches* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 92–93.

⁸⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 22.

⁸¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 5.

⁸² Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York: Random House, 1967), 68–69.

⁸³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 5–6.

Of course, these conditions may be necessary but insufficient for insurgency. It also suggests that this “model” explanation requires more than a touch of paranoia and institutionally induced intelligence for pre-insurgent conditions. But government actions may help to turn some disadvantaged groups into insurrectionary ones by their policies, or simply by neglect. In this way, a sector of the population may unite against a non-representative government on the basis of group identity provided by religion, class, ideology, region, ethnicity, or tribe. The out-group(s), unable to pursue their agendas within the political, economic or social system, becomes a recruiting pool for insurgents and further popularizes and legitimizes the idea of armed conflict. Additionally, the government’s inability to provide basic services to its populace (security, justice, health care, education, utilities, or transportation) weakens state legitimacy and strengthens sub-national loyalties. Corruption at all levels feeds disgust with the established order. Again, it must be emphasized that these conditions exist in many countries where revolution is absent. But where these conditions do exist, insurgency may be triggered by a natural disaster, an economic crisis, by political assassinations and disappearances, or fiercely disputed elections that incite political and societal turmoil.⁸⁴

The grievances that unite the insurgent group and help promote a group identity are publicized during what the CIA calls the “pre-insurgency” phase⁸⁵ to build a support base. The grievances must be communicated well enough to the broader population in order to gain and eventually justify violent actions and to build and retain legitimacy. Propaganda is crucial to the unity and expansion of the group during this stage. Today, websites and DVDs figure prominently in this endeavor. In the era of Batista and Somoza, that is the 1950s and 1960s, methods would have included pamphlets and flyers, clandestine radio stations to broadcast propaganda and revolutionary anthems, village meetings which could turn into popular courts to try or shame malefactors and establish revolutionary authority, the formation of groups in universities, factories or rural estates

⁸⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁵ The assumption, of course, is that insurgency is imminent, which justifies government surveillance and distrust of their own populations, or of groups within them. And while this may indeed be justified, the suspicion embedded in this theory of revolution is profoundly anti-democratic and might in itself encourage measures that actually provoke popular distrust and hence help to delegitimize the government in the eyes of some.

to protest injustices real or imagined, bring attention to all the grievances of the organization and help further unite the movement. Legitimate social and political organizations, demonstrations and protests, along with media exposes can provide another forum to publicize grievances to the local population as well as to the national and international community. The problem for the government, its supporters, and international partners, is to determine when legitimate democratic activity becomes subversion? Because the bar was set pretty low during the cold war or even before in Latin American societies divided often bitterly along class and/or racial lines, repression inevitably was offered as proof by the revolutionaries of the government's flaunting of democratic values and international human rights standards. This in turn helps to solidify group identity, which relies on cohesion through grievances and the creation of an "us versus them" mentality.⁸⁶ According to Chalmers Johnson, "What it [insurgency] needs is a general ideological appeal that will bring the revolutionary party the support of the people at the same time that it disguises any elements of the party's ultimate aspirations that might conflict with the demands of the mass movement."⁸⁷ The propaganda used during this phase also takes advantage of the cultural, religious, language, or ethnic symbols that set the group apart from the opposition and the nation. The use of books, movies, and music to further the cause is used plausibly to delegitimize the government as foreigners, occupiers, and instruments of outside or elite interests.⁸⁸

Recruitment, training, and the accumulation of arms, cash, and supplies is also important in this stage. A sudden disappearance of substantial numbers of a particular demographic in the population, specifically the young men, may be an indicator of subversive activity. Suspicion or rumors in the populace about arms, insurgent aims and activities, and insurgent training locations may characterize this phase. Also during this phase, recruits and insurgent members might receive training assistance or at least tolerance from a sympathetic outside country, or one unable or unwilling to challenge insurgent occupation of a portion of its territory. The insurgent group may likewise build

⁸⁶ Ibid., 6–7.

⁸⁷ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* 147.

⁸⁸ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* 2012, 6–7.

up their arms and supplies with the help of sympathetic countries and participate in criminal moneymaking initiatives, such as robberies, kidnapping for ransom, drug trade, or protection rackets, to aid this endeavor. The group typically steals weapons, equipment, or uniforms through attacks on military or police bases. During this stage, the newly formed insurgent group is still disorganized and weak.⁸⁹

Adding to the vulnerability of this stage for the insurgent group is the potential government reaction. As noted by the CIA “Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012”: “The government’s reaction in this and the next stage is perhaps the most important determinant of whether a movement will develop into an insurgency.”⁹⁰ Government countermeasures to throw the young insurgent group off balance could stunt any momentum and even knock it off track. An effective counterattack by the government at this stage of the “process” might consist of a publicity campaign that reinforces patriotism and national identity, but which runs the risk of excluding the target group by branding them as “unpatriotic” and hence fair game for government-organized retaliation through arrests, deportations or incarceration on the basis of “special” measures and decrees. Or it may encourage sectarian or ethnic strife to keep its hands clean. It can also accentuate the shared history, traditions, and culture of the predominate group to encourage a “divide-and-rule” approach to further induce mutual suspicion within a multi-ethnic or multi-denominational population and create rifts within the early-stage insurgent group or isolate their natural support base by stigmatizing them.

Alternatively, the government could address public grievances through legal, political, or economic reforms and work with moderate opposition to resolve injustices. Alas, this enlightened approach seldom happens because those who support the government have a vested interest in preserving the status quo upon which their power is based. In fact, it takes a very self-confident and institutionally solid society with a strong sense of justice to recognize inequalities and move to alleviate them within the framework of established democratic practice and political institutions. That this proved impossible for France in Algeria between 1945 and 1962, the British in Malaya, Kenya

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7–8.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

and even Northern Ireland in the 1940s–1980s, and challenged and continues to challenge even the United States during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, serves to underline the difficulties of pre-emptive reform in cold war Latin America. For this reason, the natural reaction of governments was to resort to a crack down by security forces on political dissent. However, to be successful, repression should be carefully calibrated to achieve its goals. Repression may merely achieve a short-term success if it attacks the symptom and not the disease. However, it also risks reinforcing insurgent efforts by proving their case and further creating martyrs to their cause. For instance, if security forces use extrajudicial methods (unlawful detentions or death squads) and indiscriminately target members (including moderates), it could reinforce the notion that they are under siege and should rebel before the situation becomes worse.⁹¹ Police forces that maintain voluminous files on prominent political dissenters, move to arrest them, thus eliminating the competition for the true revolutionaries of whose presence the police may be entirely ignorant. This was the case in Algeria in the 1950s, when arrests by French police of moderate Algerian nationalists cleared away the in-house competition for the radical *Front de Libération Nationale*.

2. Incipient Conflict Stage

The insurgent group initiates the incipient conflict stage when they begin violent overt operations mixed with intimidation. They may chose to use well-calculated asymmetric and terrorist tactics such as assassinations, kidnappings, small bombings, night letters, the levying of “taxes,” enforcement of “revolutionary” behavior and “justice,” and so on.⁹² The insurgent’s use of terror is aimed at convincing the populace that the government is unable to protect them against violence, thus causing some of the people in certain offended areas to transfer their support to the guerrillas for their own wellbeing.⁹³ Governments often lay the blame for the increase in violent activity on to criminals or bandits and may refuse, publicly at least, to acknowledge that they face an

⁹¹ Ibid., 8–9.

⁹² Eckstein, *Internal War, Problems and Approaches*, 93–94; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 10.

⁹³ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 147–148.

organizing conspiracy. This stage is the most vulnerable one for the insurgents because they have revealed their existence through initial attacks while they are still building their forces, support base, and remain relatively weak. During this phase, the insurgent group needs to balance the need to rally supporters, publicize its cause, and establish its viability and potential for success in the public mind. It becomes an added bonus if, through their attacks, they provoke a government overreaction which falls indiscriminately on the population, which will henceforth conclude that the government is not their ally and protector. Analyzing the actions of both the insurgent group and the government throughout this stage may determine whether the insurrection will flourish or perish in the long run.⁹⁴

Insurgent leadership is developed during this phase and could provide insight to the insurgencies' goals. Understanding the leader's goals, motivations, and previous experience (such as military training or political acumen) can be very revealing. Comprehending the leader's expectations for the insurgency's end game, and the likely tactic to reach it, can also help governments to act appropriately. "An ideal insurgent leader displays charisma, the flexibility to balance ideology with the need to be inclusive and leverage local grievances, and an ability to engender loyalty and maintain group unity."⁹⁵ Popular support or at least neutrality may count among the most important aspects for the insurgent's survivability, although insurgencies seldom win because the majority of the population supports them.

The civilian population is critical for the insurgency as it provides, willingly or unwillingly, food, shelter, medicine, funds, intelligence, recruits, and so on. In the same manner, supporters can help insurgents by not providing, or providing false intelligence, to the government security forces to protect the movement. Indicators of popular support can reveal whether the insurgent group is growing or withering. More recently, the use of the Internet can provide a good source of support and coordination—"virtual support." In this phase, the insurgent group must maintain a logistical system that can support their overt operations. This can be done through theft or capture of security force's stocks,

⁹⁴ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* 2012, 10.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

purchasing of weapons and materials on the black market, or by external assistance (transnational terrorist and/or criminal organizations or state sponsors).⁹⁶

The government's actions, as previously mentioned, are a critical element during the incipient conflict stage. The government's willingness to recognize and act in a timely manner against the insurgency can prevent the conflict from intensifying. Much like the insurgency, the government's actions must be well calculated to prevent the loss of popular support. As the CIA posits, "The willingness and ability of government leaders to act decisively, authoritatively, and to compel all elements of state power—security, economic, social, and political—to work toward a common purpose are the clearest signs of effective government leadership."⁹⁷ A major instrument used by the government to defeat the insurgency are its security forces—military, police, and intelligence. It is extremely important for the government that the security forces units be highly trained, tactically proficient, and well disciplined. It is also paramount, although seldom the case, that small tactical units be deployed with strong leadership that contain a healthy appreciation for human rights. Small tactical units can support counterinsurgency operations by using discriminate force and firepower so as to prevent driving the population to the insurgent camp. This small government footprint can only survive with a strong network of intelligence that can be effectively disseminated across agencies to ensure unity of effort. All actions against the insurgency must also be confined within the framework of the existing legal system in order to preserve state legitimacy.⁹⁸ The problem is that the legal system becomes more "flexible" in response to the "state of emergency" by introducing martial law, "special acts," or "orders in council" to allow extra-judicial methods.

Another way of growing or maintaining legitimacy is through external support. External support for the government can be critical to its counterinsurgency efforts. The government must maintain strong support from the international community, especially from its neighbors so as better to isolate its internal enemies. This coalition of support

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

can prevent or at least reduce the flow of funds, supplies, and recruits to the insurgent group, diminish the potential for insurgent sanctuary, and reinforce the government's legitimacy on the international stage. Furthermore, government partners and allies may provide training, intelligence, combat troops, advisers, and weapons.⁹⁹

3. Open Insurgency Stage

As posited by Peter Paret, military historian and World War II veteran, open insurgent warfare begins after the conquest of at least a portion of the population. These conquests, he explained, are completed after enough of the populace in a particular area has been educated, intimidated, and organized for the support of the revolution. Paret goes on to state that insurgents advance to this stage when conditions are “unfavorable to the enemy, even though his military forces may be larger and, according to traditional standards, better trained and equipped than those of the insurgents.”¹⁰⁰

As plainly indicated by the name, in the open insurgency stage, the government has not simply acknowledged that there is an insurgency but is battling attempts by the insurgency to exert control increasingly expanded swaths of territory. Attacks between the military and insurgents escalate in scope, violence, frequency, and sophistication. If external support exists for the insurgents, it now becomes more evident. Insurgents will progress from destabilization state authority to dislodging it from power. They may establish an area of control where they have driven government representatives out and have established a “shadow government” in preparation to remove the incumbent. The insurgent group seeks to increase sympathizers in the government, persuade government officials to defect, establish administrative services of their own (education, health care, courts, etc.), and be recognized as legitimate by the international community.¹⁰¹ The goal of the “shadow government” is to promote unity and maximum involvement in the movement by all groups. Chalmers Johnson explains that “As the bases are expanded and consolidated, they become a regular guerrilla ‘infrastructure,’ or an ‘alternate

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 147.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* 2012, 13.

government,' supplying the rebel forces with food, sanctuary, training centers, and manpower. Such enclaves also weaken the existing regime by removing land and population from its control."¹⁰²

During this stage, military operations on both sides continue to be critical to the outcome. Insurgents acts that are outside the accepted norms of behavior to incite violence, "sow disorder, intimidate the population, weaken the government [and its agencies], and create government repression."¹⁰³ Insurgent forces are conducting more coordinated attacks by the use of "terrorism and guerrilla warfare tactics, including hit-and-run raids on military and police units, ambushes, assassinations, improvised explosive device (IED) assaults, and attacks on infrastructure and symbols of government authority such as schools, hospitals, utilities, cell phone towers, and bridges."¹⁰⁴ Often the insurgent fighters avoid prolonged battles with government military forces because of the firepower advantage they have. On the other hand, the government's most important task during this phase is to reestablish control and security in areas of insurgent control. The security forces aim to provide the populace with security from insurgent intimidation and reprisal. If this does not occur, the people are less likely to support the government. The government may choose to deploy its forces in fulfillment of three different strategies. As defined by the CIA, the approaches are:

1. Enemy-centric approach: Aimed at the destruction of insurgent fighters and infrastructure through the use of search-and-destroy and cordon-and-search tactics.
2. Population-centric approach: Aimed at strengthening support for the government, securing the population, and search and destroy the insurgence as a secondary goal. The tactic behind this approach is to clear-hold-build, where security forces clear insurgents out, maintain security in that area, establish projects that increase support for the government, and empower the populace in order to maintain their own security against insurgents.
3. Authoritarian approach: Aimed at punishing both the insurgents and the population that supports them. This method could be

¹⁰² Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 148.

¹⁰³ *Counterinsurgency*, Department of the Army, accessed July 20, 2013, http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_24.pdf, 1–6.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 13.

counterproductive because it negates respect for human rights, winning popular support, and it promotes the overuse of force. Authoritarian governments, unconcerned with international support for their cause, are more likely to employ this tactic.¹⁰⁵

The decision to use one of these approaches is based on the country's historical experience (form of government, culture, military capability or the character of the insurgency).¹⁰⁶

As the assistance for the insurgency from external supporters might become more evident in this phase, foreign actors will more likely openly display their support. External support could bolster the political or military endeavors of the recipient through diplomatic, financial, equipment, sanctuary, intelligence, training, advisers, arms and nonlethal assistance. The alliance created with an external entity may have a shared purpose, but may also have interests that diverge. This support may provide the legitimacy required to further their cause, or it may backfire and make the government or the insurgents appear as a puppet of a foreign interest. In any case, the "external patron, in accordance with its own interests, may limit the type, scope, or location of attacks; attempt to change the nature of the conflict; or seek to prevent its client from winning, wishing instead to prolong the conflict indefinitely."¹⁰⁷

4. Resolution Stage

The resolution stage is the final stage of the insurgent life cycle. By this point, the insurgency should have progressed through the previous stages and might have even regressed several times before arriving at the end. Putting aside the lengths of the insurgency life cycle, it is inferred that each insurgency will conclude with either an insurgent victory, a negotiated settlement, or a government victory. Alternatively, a conflict may drag on indefinitely, as is the case of the FARC in Colombia, which has been in the field with fluctuating fortunes since the 1950s.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15–16.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Insurgent victory is the only conclusive outcome that has an unambiguous result. The insurgents take control of the government, eject foreign occupiers, or gain independence for a region. This outcome can also spark further insurgencies by the regime's followers or groups excluded or disappointed by the new government. The insurgent victory may have been promoted by the withdrawal of domestic support from critical segments of the populace, such as the elites. Insurgents could also unite anti-government opposition and create a stronger support base for their movement. This, in turn, might expedite the government's willingness to seek a resolution through negotiations. Other markers of insurgent victory are the withdrawal of support for the state from critical foreign allies, increased pressure from those allies to reform government policies to address insurgent criticisms, or increased support to insurgents. The weakening of the state's economy, the departure of multinational corporations, reports of military plots or coups, massive desertions, defection, or surrender or defeat of security forces are also signs of insurgent victory during the resolution stage.¹⁰⁸

The second outcome that may transpire from the resolutions stage is a negotiation settlement. In this case, the resolution stage can become fragile if spoilers attempt to destabilize peace talks. Several false starts and delays of implementation typically occur during negotiation settlements. The possible differences in ideology within an insurgency could lead to renewed violence. Splinting among the insurgent group's members could be based on the perceptions that the government is attempting to betray the movement or a general disagreement about the terms of settlement exists. Insurgencies may be fragmented by geography, faction, or ideological vision, so that achieving unity in the post-war phase may provoke internecine turf wars. This type of turmoil can occur for years after an official end to the fighting has occurred. A negotiation settlement attempt could be a technique used by belligerents to buy time and regroup after setbacks. An insurgent group is likely to negotiate in good faith and reach a compromise when they have experienced battlefield triumphs—momentarily giving them the upper-hand—but perceive overall military victory as improbable. As stated by the

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency 2012*, 17–18; Eckstein, *Internal War, Problems and Approaches*, 94–95.

CIA, “Neither party wants to negotiate from a position of weakness, and a belligerent on the decline may seek a symbolic victory to improve its bargaining position.”¹⁰⁹

Indicators that a sincere negotiation settlement could take place are in evidence when both sides deem that military victory is out of reach or insurgents believe they have a better chance of achieving their goals through a democratic political process. Likewise, a change in the government’s political leadership may promote positive negotiations. A third-party mediator, viewed as legitimate by both sides, can also help in the negotiation process by proposing acceptable conditions while monitoring a cease-fire. Lastly, another external factor that can promote negotiations is the evidence that foreign allies are withdrawing support or are pressing the government or insurgent group to negotiate.¹¹⁰

The third outcome that may occur during the resolution stage is a government victory. Much like the potential result of an insurgent victory, a government victory can tend to be a protracted process. A government victory will be evident when insurgents reduce their violent activities, lose popular support, are driven into remote sanctuaries in-country or abroad, and external assistance is cut-off. Although insurgent strength is significantly reduced, low-level violence can persist for years, particularly if insurgents turn to criminal activities (drug trafficking or resource plunder). Outside of insurgent actions, a government victory can be evident when the populace’s daily lives return to normal, government services run uninterrupted, and security forces provide safety to citizens. The overall umbrella of security will also improve the confidence of the government’s economic system, lead refugees or displaced citizens to return home, mend relationships between civilians and security forces (improving intelligence against insurgents), and allow for military units to return to base.¹¹¹

With a basic understanding of the revolutionary anatomy through both theories and progressionary stages, this thesis will pursue a more detailed historical analysis of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions in the following chapters. The prominent theories

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* 2012, 18–19.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

identified in this chapter will additionally allow for a deeper appreciation and comprehension of overall reasons for the inception of these revolutions. The basic insurgent life cycle, provided by the CIA, laid a foundational overview to better understand progression and regression of these two successful revolutions. Before diving into a deeper analysis of the critical factors contributing to the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolution, the following chapter will provide a historical background in order to gain a basic understanding of the overall setting.

III. BACKGROUND

Before focusing on the particulars that led to the success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, and allowing for a better grasp in terms of theory and life cycle covered in Chapter II, a thorough understanding of the permissive environment that allowed for these insurgencies to take root is required. This chapter will provide the historical background on both Cuba and Nicaragua in order to lay the foundations for which further examination can be accomplished. Specifically, it will cover the rise of both Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua. Additionally, it will explain how Fidel Castro's M-26-7 in Cuba and Carlos Fonseca's (among others) FSLN in Nicaragua developed and rose to power.



Figure 2. Map of Cuba¹¹²

¹¹² Vidiani.com: Maps of the World, "Detailed Administrative Map of Cuba," ivmh.net, accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.vidiani.com/maps/maps_of_north_america/maps_of_cuba/detailed_administrative_map_of_cuba.jpg.

A. BATISTA'S REIGN

Fulgencio Batista was born in Oriente province, Cuba on January 16, 1901. Both of his parents worked on sugar plantation fields and lived a humble life as part of the lower order of Cuban society. He lived in a two-room home with no indoor plumbing or access to safe drinking water. He left home at an early age and joined the army in 1921, which became the vehicle for his meteoric and improbable rise in Cuba. While those in his home village remembered the young Batista as simpatico, personable, and charming with a sharpened intuition, his military peers saw him differently: while an efficient soldier, Batista also proved to be opportunistic, cunning, devious and willing to sacrifice his erstwhile friends and allies if it proved to be to his advantage. Starting out as an ordinary infantry soldier, he managed to become a custodian in President Alfredo de Zayas estate by 1923, which gave him access to Cuba's elite. As Batista biographer Justo Carrillo explains, "Batista recognized no ethical standards of conduct; he travelled through life with no moral compass whatsoever."¹¹³

This meant that Batista had a natural ability to play both sides of Cuba's tumultuous internal politics of the 1920s and 1930s. As an example of this, while he participated in events praising President Gerardo Machado, he managed to distance himself from the less popular policies that characterized Machado's rule such as the heavy-handed practices used to deal with his opposition. Batista's ability to play the "middle ground" during Machado's regime proved pivotal to his rise. Machado ran for president in 1924 with the promise of eliminating the controversial 1901 Platt Amendment, integrated into the 1903 treaty between Washington and Havana, which gave the United States inordinate influence in Cuban domestic and foreign policy as well

¹¹³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 223; Chris Trueman, "Fulgencio Batista," History Learning Site, http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fulgencio_batista.htm; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 147; Justo Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 178–181; Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista the Making of a Dictator* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 25.

as a base at Guantanamo Bay.¹¹⁴ Not only did Machado fail to reestablish U.S.-Cuban relations on a more equitable basis, but also he amended the constitution so he could run for a second presidential term (extending his presidency from 4 to 8 years). During this second term, the mistrust among Cuban citizens for Machado's corrupt regime—tied to the economic downturn of the Great Depression—raised discontent, which led Machado to become increasingly repressive and declaring martial law throughout the island. Under these conditions, several revolutionary groups appeared, including communist influenced groups. As military courts tried these revolutionaries, Batista conveniently managed to be the stenographer for the trials while at the same time secretly becoming a member of one of the very anti-Machado groups on trial—the ABC Revolutionary Society.¹¹⁵

As violence and disorder in Cuba reached a boiling point, in 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration invoked the Platt Amendment to topple Machado in a bloodless U.S. sponsored coup.¹¹⁶ Machado fled into exile on August 12, 1933, and was replaced by Carlos Manuel de Cespedes (provisional president between August 12 to September 5). President Cespedes assigned General Armando Montes (a retired military officer) to be his chief of staff. General Montes was disliked among the military, particularly by politically active NCOs, for reducing enlisted billets and salaries. On September 3, 1933, a group of sergeants, corporals, and soldiers formed a committee they named the "*Junta de los Ocho*," or Committee of Eight. Batista led this group with the intention of meeting the enlisted corps' demands: "for no reduction of salaries; for the right to use leather leggings and flat caps like those of the officers; for no reduction in the number of enlisted personnel; for the abolition of assignments as aides to officers,"

¹¹⁴ This was the legal basis for President Theodore Roosevelt's "second occupation of Cuba" from 1906–1909. In return, Cuban products especially sugar were given preferential access to the U.S. market; Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers*, 178–181; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 195–198; Philip Brenner, *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 30–31.

¹¹⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 195–198; Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers*, 178–181; Brenner, *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, 30–31; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 145–146.

¹¹⁶ Brenner, *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, 30–31.

among other demands. Batista was quoted as saying “We aren’t going against anyone. For now, we are going to take care of ourselves, and later we’ll see.”¹¹⁷

In the politically charged atmosphere of the 1930s in which the military played an active role, Batista continued to hone his abilities to straddle the line between soldier and intuitive politician. Already affirmed as leader of the *Junta de los Ocho*, Batista also became a member of the Agrupacion Revolucionario de Cuba (ARC)—an anti-Cespedes group. On September 4, 1933, Sergeant Batista led a revolt, known as the Sergeants’ revolt, in response to further rumors of reducing the size of the military, decreasing military pay, and plans to repeal the law that allowed sergeants to become officers—a promotion through the ranks at odds with Cuba’s class based social structure. While the Sergeants’ revolt was intended to mitigate internal armed forces issues, the success of the revolt and Batista’s opportunistic actions gained the attention of politicians that later used it for political gain—turning Batista’s Sergeants’ revolt to a full-blown coup and replacing President Cespedes.¹¹⁸ Following the September 4 coup, a self-proclaimed (unelected) government under the name of *Pentarquia* (government of five leaders), with the support of politicians, was established. The *Pentarquia* seized power from September 5 to September 10, until Ramon Grau became president. Sergeant Batista was recognized as “the outstanding revolutionary of 1933.” He was promoted from sergeant to colonel overnight and became the Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army—ending the reign of elite officers in the prestigious position and establishing Batista among the most powerful and influential men in Cuba.¹¹⁹

Colonel Batista gained popularity through the implementation of a rural education program, which at the time was among the pro-peasant reforms delegated to the military to accomplish. He also gained popular support by helping during the transition of the democratic election of President Miquel Mariano Gomez in 1936 (first free presidential election in more than 11 years). Political science professor and author Anthony James

¹¹⁷ Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers*, 113–115.

¹¹⁸ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 146.

¹¹⁹ Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers*, 180, 261; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 146.

Joes posited, “As head of the army, Batista was in effect co-president with Gomez.”¹²⁰ With Batista holding the real power, the same was said about the subsequent President—Federico Laredo Bru (1936–1940). Batista even contributed to the legalization of the Cuban Communist party in 1938. At the height of his popularity, Colonel Batista ran for president in 1940 and won through the overwhelming support of ex-Machadistas and the Cuban Communist Party. Batista’s presidency was viewed as progressive and brought economic and political stability to the island.¹²¹ With the constitutional restraint of not being able to succeed himself in the presidential election of 1944 (restored after President Machado’s manipulation to stay in power), “Batista [won] widespread praise for his conduct in holding fair elections” and not attempting to maintain power.¹²² While the two elections following Batista’s time as president (1940–1944) were among the most legitimate and democratic seen to-date in Cuba, the popularity and trust of the citizens towards the government began to dwindle. The Cuban population became increasingly disenchanted with politicians and public institutions. A common sentiment among the Cuban people for President Ramon Grau San Martin (1944–1948) and Carlos Prío Socarras (1948–1952) was summed up in one word—*vendepatrias* (selling out of the homeland). Both presidents were seen as easily influenced by foreign interests, which contributed to the lack of respect from most citizens. Adding to the mistrust, both administrations were viewed as incompetent and extremely corrupt.¹²³

While Cuba was not experiencing an economic downturn (typically present before a military coup), the political division and discontent had reached a climax—generating a political crisis. In 1952, Batista capitalized on widespread public discontent with government corruption to execute a military coup. It is also important to note that before Batista conducted his military coup, he was running a distant third with a small percentage of support from the population and was projected to lose in the presidential

¹²⁰ Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 171; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 147; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 199–200.

¹²¹ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 147.

¹²² Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 40–42.

¹²³ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 6.

elections of June 1952.¹²⁴ However, once he seized power illegally, the Cuban people seemed to greet this momentary respite from politics with relief and gave him the benefit of the doubt. Subsequently, when Colonel Batista ran for president again in 1954, he won without serious opposition. But according to Anthony Joes, when Cuba, under President Batista, became a “full-time extortion racket,” residual support quickly eroded.¹²⁵ When Batista’s grip on power was increasingly threatened, much like his predecessors, he resorted to “a regime of repression characterized by states of siege, censorship, closing of universities, arbitrary arrests, and selective assassinations.”¹²⁶ His oppressive nature of governance culminated in opposition groups, such as the one led by Fidel Castro, gaining more popularity and momentum against his regime. From 1957 to 1958, the resistance groups reached their climax when the National Directorate was established—uniting guerrilla groups under Castro’s command.¹²⁷

B. M-26-7’S DEVELOPMENT AND RISE TO POWER

Before Batista’s military coup of June 1952, a young Fidel Castro was an ambitious lawyer, member of the *ortodoxo* party, and the leading Congressional candidate in the Havana district. Castro was born August 13, 1926, in the town of Biran, Oriente province. His father was a Spanish immigrant who worked his way from being a peddler, selling lemonade to sugar workers, to eventually owning or permanently renting approximately 26,000 acres. Roughly 300 families, mostly Haitian cane cutters, worked for the Castro family and sold their sugarcane to the United Fruit Company. Fidel Castro’s mother, in fact, was his father’s second wife and worked as a maid or cook in the household before their marriage. She was at least 25 years younger than her husband and was illiterate until adulthood. Castro was placed in the best schools from a young age. He attended a Jesuit-run private school as a young boy and later entered Belen College—a highly respected preparatory school. After graduating from Belen College, he attended Havana University’s School of Law and graduated in 1950. Like the

¹²⁴ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 52.

¹²⁵ Ibid; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 150.

¹²⁶ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 7.

¹²⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205–206.

majority of wealthy Cubans at the time, he was influenced by the intense political activity on campus and became a leading participant in political groups. On campus, the political intensity reached such levels that student activists carried guns due to the habitual “physical intimidation, beatings, and assassinations [that] occurred.”¹²⁸ By 1952, Castro’s political ambitions reached their height as a practicing lawyer in Havana. His disdain for the political leaders, particularly presidents Grau and Prio, influenced him to run for a Senate seat. Batista’s coup further outraged the young Castro by shattering his dreams of political office, which lead him to present a legal brief to the Court of Appeals in Havana to remove Batista from office, which the court rejected. Having exhausted his legal challenges, Castro became a leading proponent for armed insurrection.¹²⁹

On July 26, 1953 (a date that will brand his resistance group), Castro, along with an estimated 165 supporters, attacked the Moncada Barracks the second largest army base in the Oriente Province city of Santiago. It proved to be a serious miscalculation as the ill-trained and under equipped Castro forces were crushed by approximately 1,000 troops. Castro and the surviving members of his group were sentenced to jail in a minimum-security prison on the Isle of Pines. He documented his court-martial experiences in a clandestinely circulated pamphlet named *History Will Absolve Me*.¹³⁰ In an effort to gain popularity, Batista declared general amnesty for the political prisoners in May 1955, after only one year and seven months of imprisonment.¹³¹ After their release, Castro and several of his supporters fled to Mexico where they reorganized under the name of the 26th of July movement (Movimiento 26 de Julio, M-26-7). They trained in guerrilla warfare and continued to gain support through anti-Batista rhetoric. According to James DeFronzo, “Castro traveled to the United States and addressed anti-Batista Cuban exiles in New York and Florida. He raised thousands of dollars for the purchase

¹²⁸ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 53; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 200–201; Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Morrow, 1986), 103.

¹²⁹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 201; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 53; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 150.

¹³⁰ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution* 7. Ibid; Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1961), 120.

¹³¹ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 8.

of weapons, supplies, and [a] wooden, hurricane-damaged thirty-eight-foot yacht, the *Granma*, to transport his revolutionaries to Cuba.”¹³²

Fueled by his growing anti-Batista passion and confidence from the irregular warfare training he received in Mexico, Castro formulated a second plan to liberate Cuba from Batista’s dictatorship. The date of the attack was set for November 30, 1956. M-26-7’s strategy was for Castro’s forces to conduct an amphibious assault from Mexico combined with a simultaneous revolt within the city of Santiago—the second largest city in Cuba.¹³³ Castro’s second attack against Batista was a dreadful failure. His supporters onboard *Granma* were poorly equipped for the mechanical problems plaguing the old vessel and the rough seas, which resulted in a majority of the revolutionaries becoming seasick. Ernesto “Che” Guevara, the onboard medical doctor and future romanticized revolutionary, described the failed voyage, “We began a frenzied search for the anti-seasickness pills, which we did not find... The entire boat took on an aspect of both ridiculous and tragic: men with anguished faces holding their stomachs, some with their heads in buckets, others lying in the strangest positions, immobile.”¹³⁴

Adding to the already deteriorating conditions, the *Granma* arrived on December 2, 1956, two days late and in the wrong location. Castro’s 82 men wandered for three days before a peasant who led Batista’s army to them betrayed them. His revolutionary force was captured, killed, or dispersed, rendering them unfit for direct combat against Batista’s army. Fifteen survivors fled into the Sierra Maestra Mountains in eastern Cuba—a move that proved important to their future success.¹³⁵

Not only did the Sierra Maestra Mountains offer Castro’s forces the terrain to hide from Batista’s army, but linked-up with a well-established network of squatters (*guajiros*) who eventually provided the fighting and support network necessary to survive. The well-organized squatter army, led by Crescencio Perez, had a unifying

¹³² DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 202.

¹³³ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 235 8–9.

¹³⁴ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 150; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 9.

¹³⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 204; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 9–16.

grievance—mistreatment by the Cuban army who, at the behest of the landlords, had run them off the land. According to Timothy Wickham-Crowley, the squatter army numbered around 50,000 strong and had created a pact with Castro in mid-1956 (months before the failed invasion).¹³⁶ Batista's failure to take either the squatter army or Castro as a serious threat also allowed the battered rebels to regroup and gain strength.

Shortly after the Cuban army had significantly weakened Castro's forces in December 1956, Batista had announced that Fidel Castro had been killed during his failed landing. Castro masterfully utilized the *New York Times* to prove to the Cuban people and the international community that he was alive and "fully operating" in the Sierra Maestras. Not only did he prove Batista wrong on an international stage, but also he pretended to have more trained rebel troops at his disposal than he truly did.¹³⁷

To Castro's advantage, many other, mostly urban, anti-Batista groups distracted the Cuban army. Batista's strategy of dedicating most of his forces to the urban insurgents proved to be a grave miscalculation, which allowed Castro's forces to regroup in a "liberated zone" and gain peasant support. While Castro was regrouping in the mountains, urban guerrillas were more powerful and effective against Batista's forces. In March 1957, one such group, the Revolutionary Directorate (Directorio Revolucionario, DR), almost reached their goal of toppling Batista. Batista narrowly escaped the DR's attack on the National Palace in Havana when the guerrillas fought their way to his headquarters on the third-floor. The urban guerrillas' attacks not only gave Castro ample time to regroup, but also the bloody suppression by the regime was more visible to a majority of the populace who lived in the cities. This promoted the support for the revolution and increased the likelihood of radicalization in Cuban society.¹³⁸ Concurrently, Batista's armed forces became increasingly demoralized by Batista's strategic focus on Cuba's cities, the brutality of the war against the population, and by

¹³⁶ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 45, 134; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 96–97, 119–120, 140–141.

¹³⁷ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 205.

¹³⁸ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 9–11; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205.

their lack of proper counterinsurgency training. Under Batista's rule, the Cuban army became a corrupt, unprofessional, and demoralized force unable to face any domestic or international threat.¹³⁹

In May 1958, in a last-ditch effort to gain ground against the M-26-7, Batista launched a final offensive. Understanding the importance of showing the Cuban populace and international community that the Sierra Maestra's insurgent's days were numbered, he ordered his armed forces to spare nothing in order to destroy Castro's forces. Unfortunately for Batista, his army was too weak to confront the growing insurgent force and the offensive culminated in the realization that he had lost control and support in much of the Oriente region. The Army never returned to the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Instead, Batista continued his focus on the cities.¹⁴⁰ With the failure of Batista's final offensive against the M-26-7 in May 1958, military morale hit rock bottom.¹⁴¹

The M-26-7 further solidified their organization through a National Directorate, which united both the rural and urban guerrillas, in 1958. With Castro as their leader, the group focused on the goal of ousting the Batista regime. This was a significant turning point for the movement because as it added middle- and even upper-class supporters to its ranks. From 1957 to 1958, Batista amplified his repression, which resulted in popular outrage and increased support for Castro's movement across the political spectrum. Simultaneously, the United States, the regional hegemon, publicly condemned the Batista government and established an arms embargo against his regime.¹⁴²

A combination of the withdrawal of U.S. support for the regime, recent defeats at the hands of Castro's rural guerrillas, and low morale made the Cuban army effectively dysfunctional. With the M-26-7's victory over Batista's weakened forces in the summer

¹³⁹ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 153; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 206; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 221–222; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 170–171.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon H. McCormick, Steven B. Horton and Lauren A. Harrison, "Things Fall Apart: The Endgame Dynamics of Internal Wars," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4017702>, 343.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205–206.

of 1958, the regime began to unravel, especially after Guevara's guerrilla forces overran a large garrison in Santiago and met little resistance as the M-26-7 marched on Havana to seal their victory. By January 1959, Batista had fled the country and Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba with the overwhelming enthusiasm of the Cuban populace.¹⁴³



Figure 3. Map of Nicaragua¹⁴⁴

C. SOMOZA'S REIGN

Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the initiator of the Somoza family reign in Nicaragua, was born February 1, 1896 in San Marcos, Nicaragua. Somoza Sr., nicknamed “Tacho,” was the son of a wealthy coffee plantation owner and educated in the United States. During his time in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania studying advertising, Somoza Sr. met the daughter of a wealthy Nicaraguan, Ana Salvadora DeBayle Sacasa, who he would later marry. Marriage gave Anastasio Somoza access to Managua's power elites, placing him

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Vidiani.com: Maps of the World, “Political and Administrative Map of Nicaragua,” ivmh.net, accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.vidiani.com/maps/maps_of_north_america/maps_of_nicaragua/large_detailed_political_and_administrative_map_of_Nicaragua_with_roads_and_cities.jpg.

among the most influential families of Nicaragua. His ability to speak English well and his familiarity with U.S. customs and popular sports also landed him a job as a translator for U.S. officials. Despite his lack of military training, his ties to the United States and his standing among Nicaragua's elites made him the prime candidate to lead the new National Guard—Nicaragua's security forces—in 1926—in combating Augusto Cesar Sandino's rebel forces.¹⁴⁵

Sandino was a liberal general in the Nicaraguan armed forces, before the creation of the National Guard, who was adamantly opposed to U.S. intervention in Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933, and refused to lay down his arms as long as U.S. troops occupied his homeland. According to DeFronzo, "Between 1926 and 1933, Sandino's forces, which eventually grew to more than three thousand combatants, battled both several thousand marines and the Nicaraguan National Guard."¹⁴⁶ After the presidential elections of 1932, the remaining 400 U.S. Marines left Nicaragua on January 2, 1933. As previously promised, Sandino negotiated an end to the conflict with the new administration of President Juan Bautista Sacasa (Somoza's wife's uncle). But while on the surface this appeared to be a victory for the government, the agreement left Sandino's forces in defacto control of much of Nicaragua and effectively placed him in competition for national political power.¹⁴⁷

As head of the National Guard, "General" Somoza was completely opposed to this agreement and took matters into his own hands. At the end of a dinner with President Sacasa on February 23, 1934, Sandino and two of his generals were seized by National Guard soldiers, taken to a nearby field, and executed. The National Guard also surrounded Sandino's headquarters and killed an estimated 300 of Sandino's supporters.

¹⁴⁵ Maren Goldberg, "Anastasio Somoza," Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed November 2, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/554161/Anastasio-Somoza>; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237–239; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 68–69; John J. Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Council for Inter-American Security, 1982), 7, 15, 41–45.

¹⁴⁶ Goldberg, *Anastasio Somoza*, 1; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237–239; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 68–69.

¹⁴⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237–239; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 68–69; "Juan Bautista Sacasa." Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed November 2, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/515180/Juan-Bautista-Sacasa>.

Although outraged by the murder of his friend, President Sacasa's demand for justice went unanswered. Later, General Somoza admitted to issuing the order to execute Sandino. For the next two years, Somoza strengthened his grip on the National Guard by placing his loyal supporters, some from his own family, in important posts and by passing a decree that increased his control over the National Guard. This increasingly put him at odds with Sacasa in a fight that played out in the Nicaraguan Congress and the courts, where Somoza generally prevailed. In command of a loyal National Guard, Somoza ambitiously set his sights on the presidency in September 1935. In May 1936, the confrontations between Somoza and Sacasa erupted into civil war. Somoza's troops surrounded the Presidential Palace and the President's central stronghold in the city of Leon, forcing Sacasa's resignation on June 6, 1936. The eight-day civil war culminated with Somoza in control of Nicaragua and later becoming president. When Somoza took power, many upper class Nicaraguans considered him of "mala educación" or bad breeding because of his rise from the lower order of society.¹⁴⁸

Somoza's ruthless, unprincipled, and illegal climb to power remained a point of contention for many in Nicaragua. Not only was he seen as illegitimate and incapable, but his tyranny and use of position for personal gain produced solidified opposition to his rule. Rigoberto Lopez Perez, a poet and print shop worker, was among the regime's staunchest challengers. Having lived in El Salvador among anti-Somoza exiles for five years, he planned and executed a successful operation to murder Somoza. On September 21, 1956, Lopez managed to slip past Somoza's personal National Guard security detail at a party for Somoza's presidential re-nomination. Lopez fatally shot Somoza and was

¹⁴⁸ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 68; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237; John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 52–54; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 223; William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 13–14; Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 22.

immediately killed by bodyguards. Anastasio Somoza Garcia was declared dead on September 29, 1956, at Gorgas Hospital located in the Panama Canal Zone.¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately for Nicaragua, Somoza's demise failed to terminate the family business, as he was succeeded by his eldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, a graduate of Louisiana State University. Anastasio Somoza's youngest son, a graduate of the U.S.' West Point Academy, Anastasio Somoza Debayle (nicknamed "Tachito"), took over command of the National Guard. In 1963, Luis Somoza stepped aside and submitted to constitutional requirements by allowing Rene Schick, Somoza Sr.'s former foreign minister, to become president. Although Schick became titular president of Nicaragua, real power remained with the Somoza family. Schick's sudden death in 1966 saw Luis Somoza once again claiming the presidency at the end of a bloody electoral campaign dominated by anti-Somoza protests. During one such anti-Somoza protest rally, National Guard troops fired into the crowd killing an estimated 40 people.¹⁵⁰

Luis held the presidency barely a year before his brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle assumed the office following Luis' death from a heart attack in 1967. Anastasio Jr. continued to dominate Nicaragua through his use of the National Guard to intimidate opposition. His presidency came to resemble his father's in regards to corruption, intimidation, and use of the National Guard for political and personal gain. His term in office was due to end in May of 1972 in accordance with Nicaragua's law, which forbade immediate presidential re-elections. However, the innovative Somoza backed by his National Guard established a three-man junta that would rule from May 1972 until he again became legally eligible in the presidential elections of 1974.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 69–70; Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*, 1st hardcover ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 120–121; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 50–51.

¹⁵⁰ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 130, 160–161; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 71–73; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990*, 28, 32–33; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992*, 14; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 51–53.

¹⁵¹ Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 73–75; Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 18–19.

Before that could happen, however, on December 23, 1972, a disastrous earthquake struck Managua, destroying almost every building in the city. Somoza seized upon the emergency to assume total executive control over Nicaragua, which allowed him to rule by decree until his reelection in 1974. Somoza took advantage of the devastation in Managua to stimulate the economy. According to Peter Rosset: “The destruction of housing, buildings, roads, furniture, and inventories created new opportunities for investment and production to replace the items lost. In addition, a huge influx of international and public and private funds for reconstruction and insurance created the financing needed for the new investments.”¹⁵²

Unfortunately but not unexpectedly, little of this reconstruction aid filtered down to the Nicaraguan people, but instead was siphoned off by Somoza’s government and other corrupt middlemen. “Of the \$32 million sent by [U.S. President] Nixon, the Nicaraguan Treasury finally accounted for about \$16 million,” writes LaFeber. “The [National] Guard sold relief supplies for its own profit.”¹⁵³ While Somoza’s wealth flourished exponentially as a result of the earthquake, popular impatience with Somoza was expressed in increased labor unrest, an escalation of political violence, and more devastating to the Somoza regime, a rise in overall support for armed opposition. The major difference in the growth of anti-Somoza groups after the earthquake was that now the business elites, who also felt cheated by Somoza, joined the opposition, including the radical Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), transforming it into a broad political and social resistance. The growth in opposition was met by an increase in repression by the Somoza government, which further accelerated the spiral of violence.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Rosset and Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution Under Fire*, 123–124; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 237–238; Lake, *Somoza Falling*, 19–24; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 75; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990*, 33; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 169; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 54–55.

¹⁵³ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228.

¹⁵⁴ Rosset and Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution Under Fire*, 123, 147–151; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 101; Lake, *Somoza Falling*, 19; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 169; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 144; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 54–55.

The cycle of corruption and repression brought increased international pressure on the regime to reform at a time when the Somoza regime was facing a growing FSLN threat. The National Guard lacked the professionalism to thwart an increasingly sophisticated armed opposition. The FSLN conducted several successful operations that captured the eye of the international community. In reaction, Somoza declared a “state of siege,” which intensified the atrocious behavior of the National Guard and growth of anti-Somoza feeling among the populace. By 1977, Somoza suspended the state of siege in order to comply with the U.S. campaign against human rights violations. The regime also assumed that the FSLN was completely wiped-out and no longer posed a legitimate threat.¹⁵⁵

Somoza’s temporary loosening of pressure on the FSLN allowed the insurgents to reorganize and further extend their domestic support network. The opening also allowed Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a well-known editor of the opposition newspaper (*La Prensa*), to expose many of Somoza’s more corrupt and authoritarian activities. On January 10, 1978, a pro-Somoza gunman assassinated Pedro Chamorro. While he might not have been directly responsible for the assassination, Somoza was blamed for Chamorro’s death, which led to anti-Somoza protests and strikes over the next twelve months. Concurrently, the Sandinistas conducted several attacks on the Somoza regime, resulting in increased support for the group among Nicaraguans. After a major successful attack on the National Palace on August 22, 1978, Somoza re-established a state of siege. Once again, the National Guard responded with increased repression. During the Fall of 1978, they used artillery, tanks, and planes to attack neighborhoods in Managua, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 5,000 people. In light of Somoza’s increase in repression and the intensification of FSLN operational successes, the United States attempted to

¹⁵⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244; Rosset and Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution Under Fire*, 152; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 58–60.

mediate negotiations. However, U.S. pressure on the Somoza regime in the form of a curtailment of economic and military aid appeared at the time to make no difference.¹⁵⁶

On May 29, 1979, the FSLN launched the “final offensive” against Somoza’s government. With swollen ranks, the Sandinistas sprung simultaneous and sustained attacks in multiple sectors of Nicaragua. They easily took control of the North, where they had concentrated their operations for years and where had the most support. Somoza’s stronghold in the South was also being successfully attacked by the FSLN. In one last attempt at reaching a peaceful end to the conflict, Washington proposed the deployment of an Organization of American States (OAS) led “peacekeeping forces,” which was ultimately rejected by the OAS. Contributing to the domestic and international opposition to Somoza’s regime, the televised killing of ABC’s newsman, Bill Stewart, by the National Guard gave the United States no other choice but to order Somoza to leave Nicaragua in the hopes of negotiating a moderate post-Somoza regime. On July 17, 1979, Somoza fled to Paraguay and the National Guard simultaneously disintegrated because of lack of ammunition and the panic that ensued following Somoza’s departure. Sandinista fighters finally captured Managua on July 19, 1979.¹⁵⁷

D. FSLN’S DEVELOPMENT AND RISE TO POWER

Although the FSLN’s struggle produced heroic figures, the organization’s transition to power was not without friction and setbacks. On July 23, 1961, three young men—heavily influenced by the success of the Cuban Revolution—Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomas Borge, and Silvio Mayorga—met in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to establish the FSLN. They revived the name of a national hero, Sandino, to galvanize a new generation of anti-Somoza fighters. All three were influenced by Marxism-Leninism

¹⁵⁶ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246; Rosset and Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution Under Fire*, 151–154; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 102–104; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 231–232; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992*, 18–20; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 61–63.

¹⁵⁷ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 233–237; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 246; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 174–175; Lake, *Somoza Falling*, 220–222; Tierney, *Somozas and Sandinistas: The U.S. and Nicaragua in the Twentieth Century*, 63–65.

ideology and sought to reproduce the Cuban Revolution in Nicaragua. Fonseca, the illegitimate son of a poor twenty-six year old washerwoman and wealthy administrator of Somoza's properties, was considered the planner and political thinker of the group. Like many other anti-Somoza groups, they set out to recruit members and begin operations aimed at toppling Somoza.¹⁵⁸

In 1962, after having previously robbed a few banks in Nicaragua to financially support the movement, the young Sandinistas began their campaign for Nicaragua. They drew battle plans, received military training, purchased arms, and established a chain of command before they crossed the Honduran border near the mountains of the Miskito territory, not far from where General Sandino himself had taken refuge. This gave them logistical safe haven in Honduras while they continued to train and plan, notwithstanding a split among the FSLN leadership as to the preparedness of the organization to launch active combat operations against Somoza's National Guard. In June 1963, a group of about sixty Sandinista fighters crossed the Rio Coco River from Honduras to occupy the village of Raiti. They ran into National Guard forces and were destroyed in a devastating defeat. The National Guard killed about a third of the rebel force and the rest fled back across the river while others were captured by the Honduran military. In retrospect, the movement lacked peasant logistical support, intelligence, or in-depth knowledge of the local terrain. Additionally, the FSLN did not succeed in communicating their purpose to the local peasants. In fact, researchers noted that the Miskito Indians and peasants in the northern border region could rarely tell the difference between the FSLN guerrilla fighters and the National Guard. According to author David Nolan, Borge admitted that "where the population was politically and even economically primitive.... Many of them

¹⁵⁸ David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Coral Gables, FL: Institute of Interamerican Studies, Graduate School of International Studies, University of Miami, 1984), 1, 24; George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua* (London: Zen Books, 1981), 75–76; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 163; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 110, 137–139; Robert F. Turner, *Nicaragua V. United States: A Look at the Facts* (Cambridge, MA: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1987), 26; Henri Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution* (London: Distributed by Schocken Books, 1981), 20; Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 222; Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), 5; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 169–170.

didn't know how to speak Spanish, and I don't think they ever understood very well who we were. They weren't sure whether we were National Guard or what we were. We were truly alien beings for them.”¹⁵⁹

The FSLN remained virtually unknown inside Nicaragua, particularly in the rain forest along the Atlantic coast where they were based, through the mid-1960s. Due to their defeat and the realization that they did not have the popular support to continue an armed insurgency, the FSLN returned to a pre-insurgency stage in order to regroup and build links with the populace. The Sandinistas chose a new area near Matagalpa to establish their base of operations. They infiltrated thirty-five people into this region and organized them into three “columns.” They raided banks and conducted assassinations, while garnering support from the local peasants. While still divided as to the preparedness of the group to conduct overt operations, the FSLN returned to an offensive posture in December 1966. Late in 1967, they attempted a major campaign around Pancasan (east of Matagalpa), but the National Guard reacted very efficiently to counter them. On August 27, 1967, the helicopter-borne units of the National Guard decisively destroyed the majority of the group by slaying twenty of the 35 rebels, and killing many prominent leaders—namely Silvio Mayorga, one of the founding members. With all their efforts to gain support among the population, the FSLN subsequently realized that they had miscalculated the amount of support required to conduct overt operations. “Carlos Fonseca wrote later that the Pancasan operation failed because the Sandinistas encountered resistance from the peasants they sought to organize and because many of the peasants who did join the guerrillas soon deserted.”¹⁶⁰

While Pancasan was a battlefield failure for the FSLN, members of the movement considered it a political victory. They claimed that the operation proved to the whole

¹⁵⁹ Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 24–25; Shirley Christian, *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 32; Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 80–81; Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, 78–79; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 140; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242.

¹⁶⁰ Christian, *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, 32–35. Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 82–83, 98; Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 25–28; Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution*, 21–22; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 140–141.

country that the FSLN still existed and was able to mount attacks against the National Guard and Somoza's regime. The failed strategy in Pancasan and the almost concurrent failure of Che Guevara in Bolivia (October 1967), established an atmosphere of re-focus in regards to revolutionary methods. As noted by Matilde Zimmermann, "Some [FSLN leaders] wanted to maintain the focus on rural guerrilla warfare, and others favored abandoning the armed struggle to concentrate on political work in the student movement and urban barrios."¹⁶¹

The Sandinistas remained in the public eye by returning to their fundraising operations (bank holdups) and periodic terrorist activities. The major re-examination of their strategy led to an abandoning of the Cuban Revolution's "foco" theory and adapting the strategy of "protracted people's war"—influenced by Mao Zedong's *On Protracted War*. The propaganda campaign became an important part of gaining popular support and expressing the specific objectives of the movement, which included a significant dependence on Marxist concepts. The leaflets expressed more confidence than the actual size of the organization—approximately one hundred members. In 1968–1969, the group established a formal leadership structure through the establishment of a National Directorate. Carlos Fonseca became a prominent member of the National Directorate as the group's political and military chief in January 1968 and secretary-general in February 1969—the position he held until his death. Other leaders of the National Directorate included Tomas Borge, Oscar Turcios (veteran guerrillas), Julio Buitrago (urban guerrilla leader), Ricardo Morales Aviles (university professor), Henry Ruiz (former Moscow student), and Humberto Ortega. During a meeting in Costa Rica in 1969, the local police captured numerous Sandinistas, including Fonseca himself. By the time of Fonseca's release in 1970, the FSLN, with the help of an increasing anti-Somoza/anti-National Guard sentiment, had rebuilt and gained enough recruits to once again conduct another military initiative.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 99–100.

¹⁶² Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 139–140; Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution*, 21; Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 34–36; Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, 82–84; Christian, *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, 34–35; Zedong Mao, *On the Protracted War*. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954).

The military operation was called the Zinica campaign. Zinica operations, mostly supported by peasants, marked a significant success for the FSLN when, for the first time, the guerrilla group was able to engage the National Guard in frontal combat without being destroyed. More importantly, the Somoza regime was unable to hide their losses against the guerrillas when one of its helicopter gunships was downed. The Zinica campaign significantly increased the FSLN's confidence and facilitated the growth of a larger support base. By this point, the Sandinista group changed from a small, unorganized guerrilla band to an organized, supported, and integrated insurgency that posed a legitimate threat to Somoza's regime. John A. Booth notes that, "From 1970 on the National Guard began to respond differently to the FSLN."¹⁶³

From 1971 to 1973, an increase in demonstrations tied to political reform led Somoza to release several Sandinistas from prison. During this time, the FSLN lowered its military profile and continued to "grow in silence." The civic unrest was punctuated by the December 1972 Managua earthquake, rising labor conflicts, high inflation, and political dissatisfaction with Somoza's efforts to engineer a return to the office of the presidency. As previously noted, the Somoza government lost the already dwindling support of the middle- and upper-class businessmen because of the accusation of corruption during the earthquake—a significant blow to Somoza's popular support, which further kindled the anti-Somoza sentiment. The FSLN took advantage of the growing unrest and anti-Somoza mood in 1974 to resume military operations. On December 27, 1974, the Sandinista executed an extremely bold and risky operation at the house of a wealthy cotton exporter and former minister of agriculture, Jose Maria Castillo Quant. Mr. Castillo was holding a party in honor of U.S. Ambassador Turner B. Shelton. Although Ambassador Shelton had just departed the event half an hour earlier, the FSLN was able to hold prominent hostages—namely Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa (Somoza's brother-in-law) and Noel Pallais Debayle (Somoza's first cousin). Ultimately Somoza complied with all of the Sandinista's demands. The success of the operation contributed to the movement's popularity and fundraising, but also infuriated

¹⁶³ Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 140–141; Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, 84; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 70.

Somoza, who established a state of siege, which caused significant losses of personnel and cohesion within the Sandinistas.¹⁶⁴

The state of siege, which resulted in press censorship and a curfew from dusk to dawn among other repressive measures, lasted for 33 months. Fueled by the embarrassing raid, Somoza's counterinsurgency operations were defined by a form of terrorist state that did not distinguish citizen from insurgent. Allegedly, hundreds of peasant families disappeared, culminating in an estimated 3,000 deaths. The ferocity of the National Guard's counterinsurgency operations kept the FSLN pinned down and eventually resulted in the killing of several of the movement's leaders—most notably Carlos Fonseca's on November 8, 1976. The losses and differences in both strategy and ideology created a significant rift within the FSLN, which resulted in the fractionalization of the movement into three factions:

1. Proletarians (Proletarios): Led by Jaime Wheelock (among others), this group sought to mobilize the urban working class to defeat Somoza. They planned to organize the labor unions and majority of urban residents of Nicaragua's poor neighborhoods in order to promote mass strikes and demonstrations to destabilize Somoza's reign over Nicaragua.
2. Prolonged People's War (Guerra Popular Prolongada): Led by Tomas Borge and Henry Ruiz, this faction's strategy was based on rural warfare as the key to success. Influenced by Mao, the plan was to gradually buildup peasant support in order to construct a large revolutionary force to root out Somoza's regime.
3. Third Way (Terceristas): Led by Daniel and Humberto Ortega, this faction set their sights on victory through two methods—a. de-emphasize Carlos Fonseca's original Marxists ideology and b. advocate bolder attacks. Their moderate message led to the support of non-Marxist socialists, Catholic and Protestant social activists, and other anti-Somoza groups that sought social reform

¹⁶⁴ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 227–229; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 141–142; Christian, *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, 35–37; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 170–171; Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, 86–90.

and democracy. The Terceristas were most successful at promoting wide spread insurrection.¹⁶⁵

All three factions continued to gain popularity and recruits to carry out their operations. By the end of 1978, the Terceristas proved to be the more effective of the three and gained the most popularity among Nicaraguans because of their broad ideological views. The assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro on January 10, 1978, was a critical turning point for the Somoza regime. His death, while within the range of plausible denial not directly a result of Somoza's orders, was nevertheless blamed on the regime, which created a "firestorm" of support for anti-Somoza movements. The FSLN's recruitment swelled to its highest numbers (approximately 1,000 fighters). On August 22, 1978, the boldness of the FSLN surpassed that of the 1974 raid when 25 Sandinistas, disguised as National Guardsmen, occupied the National Palace. The FSLN captured over 2,000 hostages during this operation—most of the Congress and several of Somoza's relatives. It was a complete success for the FSLN. Not only did Somoza meet all their demands, but also many Nicaraguans praised the operations and viewed the leader of the operation—"Commandante Zero", Eden Pastora—as a hero and cheered the group on their way to the airport for their flight to Cuba. The audaciousness of the mission fueled mass mobilization against the regime. According to Walter LaFeber, the FSLN army swelled to 7,000 guerrillas. By September 1978, at least eight cities in Nicaragua experienced mass protests against Somoza.¹⁶⁶

Somoza's regime continued to fuel the revolution by establishing another state of siege. The National Guard was able to regain control of the cities through continued shelling, bombing, and airstrikes. In total, the National Guard killed approximately 1,500–2,000 people—mostly civilians. Although they gained control of the cities, "the

¹⁶⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242; Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, 88–97; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 171–172; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 229; Christian, *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, 38–39; Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 60–78; Turner, *Nicaragua V. United States: A Look at the Facts*, 26–27.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 172–173; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 245; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 230–232; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 155–162.

terror unleashed to defend the dynasty only strengthened the will to resist.”¹⁶⁷ All three factions of the FSLN took advantage of the public’s anger and coordinated a general strike and increased national armed insurrection. The general strike, endorsed by the majority of national businesses and industrial chambers, resulted in approximately 75 percent of businesses closing across the country. According to Booth, “on 9 September 1978, columns of Sandinistas attacked and overran National Guard stations in Leon, Managua, Masaya, Esteli, Chinandega, and Chichigalpa.”¹⁶⁸ The National Guard’s defeat undermined the morale and discipline of the force. Their atrocities reached the highest levels with reports of murders, rapes, looting, and overall destruction of property.¹⁶⁹

With so much ground being gained by the insurgents, talks of reconsolidation became reality when on March 3, 1979, a formal reunification of the FSLN took place. The reunification resulted in nine leaders, or governing directorates, for the FSLN—three representatives from each faction were selected. The reunion also led to an overall moderate philosophical change. Another transformation saw the increase in support for the FSLN by the international community and the loss of legitimacy by the Somoza regime. Attempts at OAS mediation by the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala failed. Somoza’s intransigence, continued oppression, and the failure of negotiation efforts led to spontaneous rebellions throughout Nicaragua. Economic chaos added to the Somoza’s regime losing its control. Booth posited that “in March 1979, the Central Bank defaulted on interest payments of \$65 million to international private banks, adding to the \$23 million interest payment already missed in December 1978.”¹⁷⁰

The Somoza regime’s downward spiral along with continued human rights violations led the United States to cut off all military and financial aid to the regime—a crippling blow to Somoza and inspiration to the FSLN. The Sandinistas launched their

¹⁶⁷ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 173.

¹⁶⁸ Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 162–165.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232–233; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 165–169; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 245–246; Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution*, 53–58.

final offensive on May 29, 1979 with attacks from quadrants surrounding Managua. The National Guard lost ground in the countryside and attempted to “preserve order” by increasing bombings on cities, neighborhoods, slums, and destroying factories and businesses. Nothing the National Guard attempted seemed to be working in their favor—instead it fueled insurrection. On June 20, 1979, the National Guard’s repressive behavior gained international attention when a National Guardsman murdered ABC television correspondent Bill Stewart, point-blank, in front of his own camera crew. The little international support left for the Somoza regime dissipated with the stunning, televised, event. Domestic pressures, in light of Bill Stewart’s death, pushed U.S. President Carter to terminate Somoza’s regime. Washington demanded Somoza’s resignation an initiative supported by a 17 to 2 vote in the OAS for removal of Somoza. Booth notes that, in a reprise of Batista’s flight from Cuba on New Year’s Eve 1959, “panic among Somocistas followed, as hundreds of remaining officials and collaborators crowded Las Mercedes airport in a rush to leave.”¹⁷¹

Ten days after the televised murder of Bill Stewart, Somoza broadcasted the conditions for his resignation: “preservation of the Liberal Nationalist party and the National Guard.”¹⁷² The Carter administration’s proposal for a deployment of an OAS peacekeeping force to help the transition from Somoza’s control to a five-person Junta, which the U.S. government recognized as the future government of Nicaragua, was rejected. With the National Guard’s disintegration at hand, Somoza finally left Nicaragua on July 17, 1979. The National Guard, panicked by Somoza’s departure, completely collapsed by July 18 which allowed the FSLN to take complete control of Managua on July 19 in the wake of a victory march. “On 20 July 1979, members of the junta arrived in Managua from already liberated Leon to commence rebuilding a Nicaragua laid waste by war.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 172–180; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 173–175; Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution*, 47–53; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 246; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 233–237.

¹⁷² Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 176.

¹⁷³ Ibid; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 278.

This chapter established the historical background required to further explore the critical factors leading to the success of the both the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions. It presented the details for Batista's reign along with the M-26-7's development and eventual rise to power in Cuba. Similarly, it offered a historical background for the rise of the Somoza family and the FSLN's inception, growth, and ensuing seizure of control in Nicaragua. In combination with the theories and life cycle model covered in Chapter II, this chapter allows for a focused historical analysis (Chapters IV and V) that will explore the root causes contributing to the success of both revolutions.

IV. THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

This section offers a recapitulation of the four major factors that contributed to the success of the Cuban Revolution. The intentions in this chapter is to isolate the specific circumstances that better account for the outcome of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and provide a more focused analysis of the critical factors.

A. LEADERSHIP

1. The Shortcomings of Batista's Leadership

Leadership's strategic decisions, for both the incumbent power and insurgency, significantly contributed to the success of the Revolution. Although many of Batista's strategies as president and commander of the armed forces from 1933 to 1952 have not historically been factored into analyses of Fidel Castro's success, in retrospect it becomes clear that Batista's 1952 coup seriously undermined his government's legitimacy, both in the eyes of the Cuban population, and abroad. The popular perception was that Batista's coup occurred when it became apparent that he was running third in the preliminary round of that year's presidential election. This failure to allow the democratic process to play out triggered significant anti-Batista sentiment that culminated in multiple insurgencies (urban and rural) throughout Cuba.¹⁷⁴

One group of rebels, the M-26-7 led by Castro, failed to mount a successful attack in 1953 and its major co-conspirators were jailed. Batista's strategy to gain popularity by granting amnesty to Castro and his most prominent followers backfired when in 1956, Castro's M-26-7 returned to finish what they had started—topple Batista. The movement's second attempt was another grand failure, which nearly resulted in the group's dismantling. Nevertheless, Batista's legitimacy problems continued, so that Castro's forces were able to secure a "liberated zone" in the Sierra Maestra Mountains to regroup and gain strength. A New York Times interview with Castro proved Batista's

¹⁷⁴ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 52–53; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 147–153.

boast that he had wiped out the M-26-7 and killed its leader to be a lie, further undermining the Cuban dictator's credibility.¹⁷⁵

With the significant increase in insurgent operations on the island, Batista resorted to repressive techniques characteristic of a repressive regime—selective assassinations, arbitrary arrests, closing of universities, and censorship of the press. Batista's "no prisoners" order in the late 1950s further alienated the Cuban population when even surrendered insurgents and political activists were killed or disappeared. Batista's rigorous repression of political dissent contrasted with his *mafia*cracy's toleration for other forms of illegal activity, especially gambling and prostitution for which 1950s Cuba was notorious, and this further contributed to widespread state corruption.¹⁷⁶

State corruption extended to Batista's personal control over the military. Although more details regarding the Cuban military's influence on the outcome of the revolution will be covered later in this chapter, it is important to note that Batista's direct intervention in military affairs beginning with the 1933 "sergeant's mutiny" which in essence transformed the Cuban military into his personal fiefdom, accelerated a process of the politicization and hence the de-professionalization of the armed forces. Of the roughly 500 officers in the armed forces in 1933, 384 resigned after Batista "transitioned" from sergeant to colonel in the wake of the coup. Batista further enflamed the divide in the military by promoting 527 enlisted men to officer rank in the years following his appointment as Chief of Staff. The politization and personalistic control of the military contributed to the internal corruption and institutional decline. Promotions were not based on personal loyalty to Batista. Ultimately, his control over the armed forces undermined morale, solidarity, professionalism, and patriotism necessary to defeat the

¹⁷⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 202–205; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 53; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 8–10; Herbert L. Matthews, "Cuban Rebel is Visited in Hideout," *New York Times*, February 24, 1957.

¹⁷⁶ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 92–93, 212, 222; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 7; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 195–200; Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, 206, 221; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 62.

insurgents. Batista further demoralized his forces in 1958 by firing several top generals and personally taking command of failing units.¹⁷⁷

Even as conditions deteriorated in Cuba and his regime appeared doomed, Batista clung even more tightly to power. He refused to hold early elections in order to diffuse the country's discontent and rejected negotiations with moderates such as the Catholic Church and "Friends of the Republic Society" that might have resulted in a moderate reformist alternative to Castro's Marxism. After initial missteps, Castro ultimately proved able to capitalize on Batista's miscalculations and failure to reform which left the Dictator with miniscule popular support and a hollow military to lead the revolution to victory for lack of viable alternatives.¹⁷⁸

2. M-26-7's Leadership

Although Castro's two initial attempts at toppling Batista (1953 and 1956) were utter failures, he was able to learn from his mistakes and through his charisma and strategic adjustments, capitalize on the growing anti-Batista sentiment in Cuban society. Before Castro's amphibious reinsertion in 1956, he made a strategic pact with a strong network of anti-Batista squatters (*guajiros*) in Oriente Province's Sierra Maestra region. The agreement with the oppressed squatters proved critical to the movement's existence after their failed confrontation with Batista's army because it gave his movement a popular and secure base, which it had heretofore lacked. Additionally, Castro proved very successful at acquiring funds from anti-Batista exiles, which helped finance his insurgency.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 199; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 221–222; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 58–66, 170–173; BBC, "On this Day 1950–2005: 30 December 1958," accessed July 24, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthistday/hi/dates/stories/december/30/newsid_3332000/3332479.stm.

¹⁷⁸ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 9; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56–58.

¹⁷⁹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 202–204; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 45, 134; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 152.

Castro's achievement of what today might be termed "information dominance" was extremely successful and a major contributor to his victory.¹⁸⁰ As noted by Gordon McCormick, information superiority allows insurgents to pick their battle space and even control their casualties.¹⁸¹ From the on-set of his revolution, Castro was able to conflate his struggle with that of earlier national heroes, most notably José Martí—Cuban hero and revered by Cubans as the father of Cuba's independence from Spain. As noted in the "Program Manifesto of the 26th of July Movement," Castro's vision was to continue the fight for Cuban sovereignty that Martí and others launched in the 1890s:

We are resuming the unfinished Cuban Revolution. That is why we preach the same 'necessary war' of José Martí for exactly the same reasons he proclaimed it: against the repressive ills of the colony, against the sword that shelters tyrants, against corrupt and rapacious politicians, against the merchants of our national economy.¹⁸²

Castro's arrival from Mexico by boat in 1956 with 81 armed revolutionaries and his use of the Oriente Province to regroup his forces after his second failed attack symbolized the congruence between José Martí's 1895 invading force and his own, an analogy which he emphasized in his propaganda.¹⁸³

In addition to undermining Batista's credibility, Castro's interview with the *New York Times* served as a tremendous use of propaganda and an equally symbolic use of Jose Marti's heroism.¹⁸⁴ Jose Marti, who lived in New York from 1881 to 1895 as a critic for the *New York Sun*, cleverly arranged an interview after his landing in Oriente

¹⁸⁰ The information dominance that Castro gained was based on his ability to capitalize on anti-Batista sentiment and create effective propaganda (pamphlets and radio stations), which helped the overall information operations. Additionally, Castro was able to gain intelligence from the Cuban military when high-ranking, anti-Batista officers decided to clandestinely provide critical intelligence to Castro's forces.

¹⁸¹ Dr. Gordon McCormick, Seminar on Guerrilla Warfare class on November 14, 2013. Dr. McCormick is the Dean of the Graduate School of Operational and Information Sciences at the Naval Postgraduate School and teaches the Guerrilla Warfare Seminar that covers irregular, unconventional, guerrilla, and insurgent warfare.

¹⁸² Philip Brenner, *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1989) 36; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 174.

¹⁸³ Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: Liveright, 2013), 428.

¹⁸⁴ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 175.

with the *New York Herald* in order to gain international support for the independence of Cuba.¹⁸⁵ Castro's interview with Herbert Matthews from the *New York Times* on February 17, 1957 had both domestic and international affects. Although having only about fifteen trained guerrillas at the time of the interview, Castro told Matthews that his forces were organized in groups of between 10 and 40 men. He even had one of his men deliver him a fictitious message from the imaginary "second column" to report on their success against the "demoralized" Cuban Army. Although some might claim that the forces consisted of the Sierra Maestra squatters, it is also generally accepted that the squatters were not trained in guerrilla warfare before the interview.¹⁸⁶

Understanding the importance of U.S. support for his cause, Castro "appeared to be a non-Marxist, moderate nationalist with U.S.-style democratic ideas. Although he displayed hostility to the U.S. government for providing bombers, weapons, and munitions to Batista, he claimed the rebels wanted friendship with the United States."¹⁸⁷ Matthew's report claimed that Castro " 'has a mastery of the Sierra Maestra' and opined that 'General Batista cannot possibly hope to suppress the Castro revolt.'"¹⁸⁸

Of course, propaganda would have been proven of limited effectiveness had Batista had been able to muster a modicum of domestic and international legitimacy. The larger-than-life personality of Castro at the head of his movement of rural insurgents appealed both to peasants and the middle class in Cuba. The fact that a group of "rough and tough" young men and women, many of them like Castro middle class and university educated, were willing to risk their lives and live in remote areas of Cuba in order to continue the revolutionary cause started by Martí was (and still is for some) a romanticized propaganda narrative. The *barbudos* or bearded ones, as they were called, exemplified the David and Goliath story in the bible. Castro, knowing that the image of

¹⁸⁵ Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*, 436; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 192.

¹⁸⁶ Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*, 436; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 10–11; Matthews, *Cuban Rebel is Visited in Hideout*.

¹⁸⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 11; Matthews, *Cuban Rebel is Visited in Hideout*.

the rural forces led by educated revolutionaries resonated in Latin American history since the rebellion against Spain after 1808, disregarded and even condemned the actions of urban guerrillas as an illegitimate, new-fangled strategy, discredited by Mao and Ho Chi Minh's twentieth century success with peasant revolution. Victors invariably spin the explanations for their success, and so in the case of the Cuban Revolution, the contributions of urban guerrillas were de-emphasized. In fact, the urban guerrillas were the stronger force when Castro decided to conduct his failed amphibious assault with only 81 men. Also, the urban guerrillas recruited most of the 82 men that constituted Castro's forces. After the failed amphibious attack in Oriente in 1956, when Castro had fifteen total men (including himself), the urban guerrillas kept Batista's forces occupied and continued to play a critical role in recruiting both urban and rural guerrilla forces.¹⁸⁹

In a show of strength, on March 13, 1957, an urban guerrilla attack on Batista's presidential palace nearly assassinated Batista and prepared conditions for a take over of the government. This was the closest any guerrilla force had ever come to killing Batista. Instead of showing support for the urban guerrillas who had come close to destabilizing Batista's government, Castro condemned the attacks—an obvious ploy to gain “points” for his public relations propaganda campaign.¹⁹⁰ In 1969, almost ten years after the conclusion of the revolution, when Castro was secure as the leader of Cuba with overwhelming domestic support as well as Soviet sponsorship, he conceded the importance of the urban guerrillas to his success:

Almost all attention, almost all recognition, almost all the admiration, and almost all the history of the Revolution [has] centered on the guerrilla movement in the mountains.... This fact tended to play down the role of those who fought in the cities, the role of those who fought in the clandestine movement, and the extraordinary heroism of young persons who died fighting under very difficult conditions.¹⁹¹

Castro's ability to capitalize on Batista's mistakes was also illustrated through the use of rebel-created radio stations. Batista's repression of media through nationwide

¹⁸⁹ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 9–10.

¹⁹⁰ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 155.

¹⁹¹ Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 16.

censorship provided Castro with a niche in the propaganda realm. While there were several clandestine radio transmitters used by the M-26-7 group, the most notorious was *Radio Rebelde*, which began broadcasting on February 23, 1958. According to Philip Brenner, “Cuban audiences eager to hear news not censored by the Batista government consequently tuned in to Radio Rebelde...,” which was run “by Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, who eventually became one of the most listened-to voices in Cuba and much of the Caribbean.”¹⁹² *Radio Rebelde* also helped gain rebel support from within the demoralized Batista military. In one broadcast Castro stated, “We are at war with the tyranny, not with the armed forces.”¹⁹³

Castro ramped-up propaganda and capitalized on the fact that the Cuban Army was disillusioned with Batista and its corrupt military commanders. With a core of disillusioned young military officers (and some high ranking) providing intelligence, Castro’s forces were able to avoid military sweeps and even to manipulate the Cuban Air Force’s bombing codes (provided by defectors of Batista’s military) to napalm Batista’s own men. Many poorly trained and disheartened Cuban Army soldiers were captured by the rural guerrillas and later released by Castro in a continued effort to garner support from the armed forces and the populace. In one such instance, Raul Castro (Fidel Castro’s brother and commander of guerrilla forces) conveyed to one of the groups of released soldiers: “We took you this time. We can take you again. And when we do we will not frighten or torture or kill you, anymore than we are doing to you at this moment.”¹⁹⁴

Castro was also able to consolidate major insurgent groups in Cuba, both urban and rural, by creating and assuming the leadership of the National Directorate. This

¹⁹² Brenner, *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, 220; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 177.

¹⁹³ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 159.

¹⁹⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 204; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 157–160; Brian Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1999), 159.

unification of efforts created two unified fronts that proved too difficult for Batista's forces to handle—ultimately leading to his downfall.¹⁹⁵

B. POPULAR SUPPORT

1. Batista's Popular Support

As previously indicated, the repressive nature of Batista's regime and Castro's ability to capitalize on his miscalculations resulted in a lopsided battle for popular support, which was instrumental to the outcome of the Cuban Revolution. In addition to Batista's undemocratic and corrupt rule, he lost significant support when he did not deliver on his promises to improve the deteriorating social, political, and economic environment in Cuba. Continued government corruption, uneven distribution of wealth, high unemployment (mostly in rural areas), and the overall decline of real income in the 1950s contributed to the growing grievances in Cuban society.¹⁹⁶

Batista's only support in 1952 was based on the popular reforms implemented during his first period in power from 1933. Many lower class Cubans supported Batista, a mulatto of modest origins, especially Afro-Cubans who generally occupied the lower rungs of Cuban society. The middle- and upper-classes were tolerant of Batista during the early 1950s. As mentioned above, Batista's popular support began to plummet when the *New York Times* interview with Castro was televised, which served to undermine his credibility. Batista continued to maintain the support of the Communist party in Cuba until the late 1950's, when his reign was clearly unraveling. While surprising in retrospect given the subsequent support given Castro by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), traditional communist parties in Latin America tended to look upon rural insurgents as romantics, in the doctrinaire belief that urban working classes made revolutions, not peasants. Batista's growing corruption and aggressive repression that did not distinguish between insurgents and regular citizens gradually undermined support and

¹⁹⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56–58; McCormick and Steven B. Hortan and Lauren A. Harrison, "Things Fall Apart: The Endgame Dynamics of Internal Wars," 342.

¹⁹⁶ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 189, 198; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 57.

made Castro, who shrewdly obfuscated his true goals, appear as a viable option. Batista's *mafia*cracy anchored in a military made up of lower class upstarts embarrassed the upper-class and pushed the middle-class to desire constitutional rule—two critical sectors of Cuban society. Batista's unwillingness to negotiate or hold elections toward the end of his regime also diminished his already evaporating popular support. Ultimately, Batista lost legitimacy among all spectrums of Cuban society, which directly kindled support for his opposition.¹⁹⁷

2. M-26-7's Popular Support

Throughout the growing discontent with Batista's regime, Castro successfully exploited the government's blunders in both the domestic and international realm. The M-26-7's use of mass media, their moderate message, and creation of the National Directorate combined to boost support for the movement. The significant support provided by the 50,000 strong network of squatters also provided a popular base for the insurgency. It is also important to note that initial support for Castro's movement came from universities (which had autonomy from government intrusion), urban youth, and professionals. Since the urban guerrilla fighters contributed to the overall success of the Batista opposition (including the M-26-7), the bulk of the Cuban armed forces concentrated their offensive on them. This resulted in the growing defeat of the urban guerrilla fighters and left Castro's *barbudos* as the only viable opposition. The M-26-7's promises of free elections, land reform, and improvements in schools and health care system further increased popular support for the revolution. Towards the end of the insurgency, a combination of battlefield victories and the release of Cuban Army prisoners helped the movement gain further popular support and more importantly, undermined the will to resist within Batista's Army.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 223; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 171, 187–189; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 62.

¹⁹⁸ Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol, "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World," *Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (Dec 89): 492, doi: 10.1177/003232928901700403; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 42, 53–57, 140–141, 190–191, 271, 327; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 45, 134, 214.

C. EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

External factors also significantly contributed to the success of the Cuban Revolution. Beginning before the M-26-7 came to existence, the United States' intervention in Cuba contributed to the instability that created an environment where revolution was possible. Barrington Moore notes that the "Politics of a small nations are determined in large part by the actions of the larger nations around them."¹⁹⁹ Some theorists note that from Cuba's colonial period, Washington's direct and extended politico-military intervention weakened domestic party politics and encouraged states of mafiacracies. While this case can be argued, it is also true that the US' intervention allowed Cuba to break free from Spain and gain a level of independence never experienced in its history. In either case, their early involvement did allow for the chain of events that led to the Cuban Revolution in 1959.²⁰⁰

A persistent external factor to the revolution, the United States, both directly and indirectly, influenced the outcome of the Cuban Revolution. At the beginning of the Cold War, the United States trained the Cuban Army to be an element of defense in the Western Hemisphere in case of Soviet invasion. As important, particularly during the last two years of the insurgency, the U.S.' failure from 1958 to provide military assistance to the Batista government in combating the insurgency may be said to have provided the final blow to a failing Batista regime. Starting with the symbolically important arms embargo in March, both the government and military's morale plummeted to its lowest level. The M-26-7 fighters, conversely, became more emboldened and Cuban society as a whole recognized that Batista's days were numbered.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, xii–xiii; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 230.

²⁰⁰ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 14–15, 218–219.

²⁰¹ Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 155; Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, 202; Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*, 159; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 272; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 12.

Adding to the already demoralized regime, Washington withdrew recognition of Batista's government following the corrupt elections of 1958. The United States went as far as to ask Batista to leave the island, both in order to contain the growing dissatisfaction in Cuba and as a prelude to a peaceful resolution of the political imbroglio. At the same time, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) attempted to free Colonel Ramon Barquin, jailed in 1956 for his failed coup attempt against Batista, from Cuban prison to provide a credible alternative to both Batista and Castro. Unfortunately, the attempt was futile because the imprisoned colonel was already a member of the M-26-7 and not a "democratic" alternative to Castro.²⁰²

The CIA was also said to have provided direct assistance to Castro's forces. Tad Szulc, a reporter and author, claimed that the CIA provided no less than \$50,000 to central figures of the M-26-7. Other significant support for Castro's movement came from anti-Batista exiles and American sympathizers living in the United States. Ex-Cuban President and exile, Carlos Prío, was charged in the United States for taking part in actions supporting Castro's movement. Researchers claim that the M-26-7's funds amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars, with Castro having a steady monthly income of \$10,000. The guerrillas were also said to have enjoyed long-term and sustained arms assistance from abroad. In fact, during 1957 alone, the US government intercepted approximately \$250,000 worth of shipments headed to the M-26-7. While this amount seems significant, particularly for the time, historians presume that most of the shipments got through anyway—making up only an estimated 15% of Castro's weapons. Similarly, the interim revolutionary government in Venezuela allegedly gave Castro about \$50,000 in 1958 alone and airplanes from Costa Rica landed in a Sierra Maestra landing strip with arms and other hardware.

Another external factor that allowed the M-26-7 to regroup after initial failed attack on the Moncada Barracks (and later pardon) was the safe haven provided by

²⁰² Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 57; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 224, 230; Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*, 158. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 81; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 161.

Mexico where Castro was able to join some of his friends (namely his brother Raul Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara), study political philosophy, began training in the basics of irregular warfare, and to plan his second attack on Batista’s regime. In addition, Castro also received arms from Mexico throughout his insurgency.²⁰³

After his second failed attack on the Batista regime and escape to the Sierra Maestra Mountains, Castro effectively used international media to support his cause. As previously noted, the televised interview with the *New York Times* helped the M-26-7 and harmed the Batista regime, which increased both domestic and international support for the M-26-7.²⁰⁴

Lastly, the Catholic’s Church’s failed attempts to open a dialogue with the Batista regime toward the end of his reign was a symbolic blow that proved Batista’s intransigence and further sealed the ruler’s fate.²⁰⁵

D. MILITARY FACTORS

The Cuban military contributed to the outcome of the Cuban Revolution in numerous ways. In order to start understanding its contribution, it is first necessary to examine the Cuban military’s history. Like most Latin American militaries, that of Cuba, established in 1909, was not built for the purpose of protecting the nation against foreign enemies, but instead to protect the interests of the privileged classes by insuring internal order. Adding to its already weak institutional structure, President Gerardo Machado (1925—1933) further undermined professionalism in the military by promoting those most loyal to his regime. Machado also gained favor with the military by increasing pay and improving overall conditions—some were considered lavish in comparison to

²⁰³ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 14–15, 218–219; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 4; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 145–146, 150, 152; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 168.

²⁰⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 10–11.

²⁰⁵ Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait*, 427–428; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 152, 165; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 87–88; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56.

majority of the Cuban populace. Having the majority of the military on his side, Machado became a corrupt, repressive, and bloody dictator. His extension of political patronage into the ranks of the military created an officer corps more interested in personal enrichment and political influence than achieving military proficiency. While this was particularly true in the upper ranks, junior officers were expected to play the game in the hopes that one day they too would gain access to wealth and privilege. This created a split among the young (optimistic) and the older (corrupt) officers, which had the unintended consequence of politicizing and strengthening the position of the non-commissioned officers corps (NCO) and enlisted ranks.²⁰⁶

In these conditions of politicization of the Cuban military, in 1933, the opportunistic Sergeant Batista organized a successful coup both against Machado's regime and the Cuban officers who supported it. The rise of Batista to colonel and as head of the military after the 1933 coup added to the military discontent. A majority of the officers correctly viewed Batista as unqualified for the position and resigned in protest, an act which misfired as it allowed Batista to grant an unprecedented 527 commissions to enlisted men. But rather than revive professionalism in the Cuban military, it became a case of *plus ça change*, as Batista used it as a tool of personal patronage much as had Machado. From 1933 to 1952, Batista ruled Cuba either directly as president or from the wings as armed forces chief. Batista based officer promotions on loyalty to him and frequently passed over officers trained in the United States. This deepened the divide in the Cuban officer's corps between "politicals" and "professionals," which further weakened the institution. The creation of the Cuban military academy in 1940 to provide some basic entrance requirements and a professional foundation proved to be too-little, too-late to make a significant difference in the armed forces.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, Or, the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 680–683; Carrillo, *Cuba 1933: Students, Yankees, and Soldiers*, 6–8, 19–20, 115–117; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 145–146; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 172.

²⁰⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 199; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 64–66, 170–173, 221–222; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 153; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 15.

Before 1956, Batista's military was already too weak to defeat an insurgency that was gathering momentum for reasons mentioned above. Professionalism was severely lacking, civil-military tensions remained high, and Batista's corruption turned the military into a beneficiary of the government's spoils system. The regime would use the military as an arbiter in politics and to stifle labor movement strikes. By the time Castro's forces attempted their second failed attack on Batista's regime, the Cuban military was abusing and exploiting peasants in the Oriente region. This led to a growing opposition to Batista's armed forces. At the direction of Oriente landlords, Batista's army evicted squatters, adding to the province's misery. Squatters also became collateral damage during operations against "guerrillas." By mid-1956, Colonel Ramon Barquin and other officers had tired of Batista's use of the military as his private domain and conspired to remove him. Although Barquin's military coup failed, it provided a worrisome sign of growing discontent within the military.²⁰⁸

The dissatisfaction of a portion of the military with the regime gradually transitioned into sympathy for the revolution. There was a general sense of disgust among fellow soldiers, caused both by internal corruption and Batista's "no prisoners" order in late 1950s. On September 5, 1957, a group of young pro-Castro naval officers stationed at a base in Cienfuegos, violently clashed with the army. Although the uprising—later named the naval mutiny—was brief, it proved to both the military and the guerrillas that anti-Batista sentiment within the military was at a climax. The crumbling cohesion of the military, its discontent with Batista, a low level of professionalism, and the army's inability to find and destroy Castro's forces led Batista to take drastic measures. During the height of the fighting in 1958, Batista reorganized his army to instill some energy and better direct their efforts. Unfortunately for him, it actually compounded his problems—he kept his most trusted and best-trained officers near him for personal protection and dispatched the young officers and recruits to fight in the mountains against battle-hardened guerrillas. He also reduced military training from 6

²⁰⁸ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 42, 56; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 154; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 45, 64; Huntington, *The Soldier and the State; the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, 15.

months to 30 days, which contributed to repeated failures against the rural guerrillas and increased their susceptibility to Castro's propaganda, which reached them principally through *Radio Rebelde*.²⁰⁹

Batista's failed offensive in 1958 proved that his reorganization of the military did not help his campaign against the M-26-7. Instead, it lowered morale and essentially opened a pathway for Castro's forces to march on Havana. The last time the Cuban army set foot in the highly contested Sierra Maestra Mountains was 1958. Commanding officers refused to fight rebels and some continued to organize mutinies against Batista. The second in command of Cuban intelligence was already providing the M-26-7 with critical information. Batista was made aware of his armed force's powerlessness in late 1958 when a prominent general told him that soldiers were tired and officers would not fight. By this point, soldiers, already poorly trained and who were not paid, refused to fight, while air force pilots grounded their aircraft. News of army troops surrendering and crossing over to the guerrilla lines had become a common occurrence.²¹⁰

The actions of the United States—arms embargo and withdrawal of recognition for the regime—also significantly reduced the armed force's morale and will to fight. When the M-26-7 began their offensive in the fall of 1958, the Cuban army was so institutionally weakened that they withdrew in the face of oncoming (numerically inferior) rebel forces. A far superior Cuban Army garrison surrendered to Castro in the city of Santiago, which had a domino effect resulting in Castro's force's triumphant march to Havana.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 206; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 154, 157; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 11; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 64; Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*, 158; McCormick and Steven B. Hortan and Lauren A. Harrison, "Things Fall Apart: The Endgame Dynamics of Internal Wars," 345.

²¹⁰ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 57; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 199, 206; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 14–15; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 61–62; Joes, *Victorious Insurgencies: Four Rebellions that Shaped our World*, 156–158; McCormick and Steven B. Hortan and Lauren A. Harrison, "Things Fall Apart: The Endgame Dynamics of Internal Wars," 345.

²¹¹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 205–206; Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 56; Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, 12; Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*, 159.

This chapter confirms that the four major factors presented here were critical contributors to the success of the Cuban Revolution. The focused historical analysis presented in this chapter strengthens the assertion made in this thesis that the four major contributors to the success of the Cuban Revolution were leadership, popular support, external influence, and the military. This allows for a more focused and descriptive analysis of the Cuban Revolution in regards to the theories presented in Chapter II. The following chapter will provide a similar analysis of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

V. THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION

As in Cuba in the 1950s, the success of Nicaragua's 1979 Revolution can be attributed to the same four factors in the previous chapter: leadership, popular support, a favorable international environment, and an incumbent military that was politicized, repressive, corrupt, and unprofessional.

1. The Shortcomings of Somoza's Leadership

Chalmers Johnson noted that, "elite intransigence... always serves as an underlying cause of revolution."²¹² Like Batista in Cuba, Somoza ran Nicaragua as what Wickham-Crowley describes as a *mafia*cratic state. Nicaragua was run as a Somoza family enterprise under the direction of its patriarch Anastasio Somoza Debayle ("Tachito").²¹³ "The 'neopatrimonial' (or 'sultanistic') character of the Somoza dictatorship, coupled with Anastasio Somoza Debayle's own unpredictable and self-destructive behavior—which, under the circumstances, was necessarily *state*-destructive behavior—was the key factor behind the rapid Sandinista triumph," writes Jeff Goodwin.²¹⁴

Somoza's long reign was anchored primarily in his ability to divide his opponents through a combination of intimidation (with the use of the National Guard), bribery, and when necessary, imprisonment and death. Under the Somoza family rule, Nicaragua was militarized and economically underdeveloped.²¹⁵ Most scholars of the Nicaraguan Revolution agree that the Somoza regime was "constantly exclusionary, anti-reformist, and more or less indiscriminately repressive of their political opponents (moderates and reformists as well as revolutionaries) throughout the 1960s and 1970s."²¹⁶ These

²¹² Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 97.

²¹³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 212; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 269–270.

²¹⁴ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 182.

²¹⁵ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 3rd ed., 238; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 33.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

characteristics contributed to the international and geopolitical isolation that facilitated the ultimate success of the FSLN.²¹⁷

From its inception, the Somoza family used the National Guard to enforce their *mafiacracy*. The repressive use of the National Guard peaked during the 1970s, when Somoza employed them for personal gain and as a tool to remain in power.²¹⁸

While the vast majority of Nicaragua's population lived a poor or modest lifestyle, the Somoza family wielded their political power for personal enrichment, in particular by siphoning off U.S. aid and private investments that poured into Nicaragua. They also benefited from "prostitution, gambling, construction kickbacks, and taxation."²¹⁹ A Nicaraguan banker noted: "It was an ingenious thing. For 45 years the Somoza family ran this country like their own private enterprise. The country was only a mechanism to invest abroad."²²⁰ However, they also "invested" at home, owning approximately two million acres with 274 properties (46 houses, 69 haciendas, 76 other urban lots, 13 industries, 16 unfarmed land holdings, among others), a fifth of the national agriculture production, and numerous foreign assets.²²¹

As noted earlier, Somoza's corruption knew no shame, when he pocketed most of the money donated for recovery and reconstruction efforts following the 1972 earthquake that devastated Managua. President Nixon sent \$32 million of which \$16 million was unaccounted for. Corruption on this scale proved too much, even for Nicaragua's business-class, which never forgave him. The grievances created by the devastating earthquake were amplified by the realization that Somoza was taking advantage of the populace's suffering

²¹⁷ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 263.

²¹⁸ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 65–68; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 236–237.

²¹⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 226.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 270; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 223.

for his own enrichment, which alienated Somoza from the middle- and upper-class of Nicaragua—a sector of the population crucial to maintaining control in the country.²²²

Somoza's corruption seemed to have no bounds. He reportedly used any method necessary to remain in power, including buying votes, ballot box stuffing, and even rewriting Nicaragua's Constitution. Electoral fraud was a legacy of the Somoza family regime, which was part of the already repressive and exclusionary government. In 1974, Somoza even brought criminal charges against election boycotters (fueled by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro's news reports in *La Prensa*) and declared nine parties illegal. Allegedly, his henchmen paid people off, which resulted in a 20 to 1 victory for Somoza that year.²²³ Somoza's cynicism and sense of impunity knew no bounds – rather than deny accusations of electoral fraud, he instead replied to his accusers who had called him a “son of a bitch”: “You won the election, but you lost the count. And the bigger son of a bitch is he who loses what he's won.”²²⁴ The combination of natural disaster and corruption fueled economic decline in the 1970s, exacerbated by the fact that too much money was being spent on the National Guard, while capital fled Nicaragua due to the growing FSLN threat. Guerrillas attacked large farms and power plants, which contributed to the destabilization of the economy.²²⁵

Somoza's poor leadership was likewise revealed through his handling of highly successful opposition actions. When the FSLN seized a number of Nicaraguan and foreign officials during a dinner party in late 1974, Somoza responded by declaring a state of siege, which critics characterized as a campaign of state sponsored counter terror. Somoza-directed repression attracted the condemnation of the international community

²²² LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 221.

²²³ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228–229; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 157, 162; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 238; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 222.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 230; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 269; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 166; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 270–271.

during 1975 and 1976, “when priests testified before Congress about Guard atrocities.”²²⁶ During the state of siege, the regime did not distinguish between moderate and radical opposition. While this campaign of repression directed at the FSLN was partially successful (causing the split of the FSLN into three factions), his aggressive actions alienated many in the populace.²²⁷ Additionally, when Somoza experienced a heart attack in the summer of 1977, he sent the wrong message to his countrymen when he fled to Miami to be seen by doctors—which simply called attention to Nicaragua’s inadequate medical care. Moreover, the heart attack also made him seem vulnerable both among the opposition and the general populace.²²⁸

Following the dramatic September 1978 seizure of the legislative palace by the FSLN, Somoza’s aggressive reaction, once again, further shocked the population and the international community. Between the unprecedented success of the FSLN operation and Somoza’s poor leadership, the guerrilla ranks multiplied. Stories of atrocities carried out by the National Guard spread in both the domestic and international realm. One survivor of the post-September 1978 crackdown recalled, “I could see what they did to my mother after they killed her—they slit her stomach open with a bayonet. They cut off the genitals of my brother-in-law and stuffed them in his mouth.”²²⁹ When the OAS human rights team arrived to investigate the atrocities and later reported on the many inhumane actions of the Somoza regime, the anti-Somoza sentiment boiled over into spontaneous uprisings, which further added to opposition ranks. In other words, like Batista in Cuba, Somoza’s excessive repression alienated him from all of Nicaraguan society.²³⁰

During the FSLN’s final offensive, launched in mid-1979, Somoza’s Guardsmen responded by rocket-bombing slums and indiscriminately killing women and children. After years of atrocities aimed toward the FSLN, the National Guard was accustomed to

²²⁶ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 229.

²²⁷ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 159.

²²⁸ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 230; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 269; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 166.

²²⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232.

²³⁰ Ibid; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244.

treating all civilians as enemies. Between the pressure from the OAS, the Carter administration, the Nicaraguan citizens, and the perception that the FSLN was on the verge of defeat, Somoza eased the pressure on opposition groups. This miscalculation (among others) allowed the opposition to regroup, extend its support network, and ultimately allowed it to take power in Nicaragua.²³¹

2. FSLN's Leadership

The initial leaders and founders of the FSLN in 1961 (Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomas Borge, and Silvio Mayorga) were all instrumental to the opening stages of the movement. But of the three, Fonseca was the most recognized for consistent and influential leadership. He promoted Marxist concepts while resuscitating a national hero—Augusto Cesar Sandino—as the inspiration and precedent for the FSLN insurgency. Fonseca's strategy of invoking the example of Sandino both minimized and legitimized the Marxist ideology, which proved to be among the most important IO decisions of the organization. It was Fonseca's drive, inspired by the precedent of the Cuban Revolution, and his ability to articulate the movement's program that made him the most recognized leader of the FSLN.²³²

In 1960, Fonseca had received guerrilla training from a surviving veteran of Sandino's original army. Although the FSLN experienced multiple failures at the beginning, Fonseca's leadership and his influence among his followers permitted the FSLN to continue to fight in spite of daunting odds.²³³ While the FSLN suffered many setbacks as Somoza's repression was successful, in late 1974 Fonseca was able to deliver a major blow to the Somoza regime when the FSLN attacked a party in honor of U.S. Ambassador Turner B. Shelton. Although Shelton had departed the party minutes earlier, the FSLN took multiple Nicaraguan and foreign officials hostage. Somoza gave in to all of the movement's requests, which emboldened the FSLN, increased popular support for

²³¹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 233–234; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 80–81; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242.

the opposition, and showed the Nicaraguan populace that Somoza's government was vulnerable. Following this successful attack, Somoza retaliated by launching a state-terror campaign, during which, in 1976, Fonseca was killed fighting the National Guard.²³⁴

Military pressure by the National Guard combined with Fonseca's death split the FSLN into three factions. Among the more prominent leaders that rose from this split were Daniel and Humberto Ortega—spearheads of the ultimately successful Tercerista faction. The Ortega brothers were able to create a broad ideological umbrella that united those in Nicaragua—and there were many—who hated Somoza.²³⁵

Eden Pastora ("Commandante Zero") was a notable leader and member of the Tercerista group who organized the seizure of the Legislative Palace in 1978, which amplified support for the movement and elevated Pastora as one of the opposition's idolized leaders.²³⁶ Following Pastora's successful attack, the FSLN membership inflated to approximately 7,000. The group unified once again under Tercerista ideology in March 1979, and increasingly gained international support from Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama—among other countries. During this reunification period, the leadership began to broadcast radio messages, which successfully spread the movement's agenda. Between "Radio Sandino" and "Radio Reloj," the group was not only able to increase support, but also became exceedingly proficient at sending clandestine/coded messages to active guerrillas in regional fronts.²³⁷ According to Wickham-Crawley, the Sandinistas viewed radio broadcasting as an "essential medium for creating and accelerating revolutionary conditions'.... The Sandinistas even argued

²³⁴ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 241, 244.

²³⁵ Ibid; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 273.

²³⁶ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 245.

²³⁷ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242–246.

that the use of radio went beyond simple communication, in helping to create a culture of resistance to the Somoza regime.”²³⁸

The FSLN launched its final offensive in mid-1979. The regime’s reacted, as in the past, with indiscriminate violence, which further fueled the anti-Somoza/National Guard sentiment in Nicaragua and the international community. The eventual disintegration of the Somoza regime allowed for the FSLN to march on Managua and take control of Nicaragua.²³⁹

B. POPULAR SUPPORT

1. Somoza’s Popular Support

The success of the revolution was due in large part to the fact that Somoza did not value the need to maintain support and legitimacy among the population. Popular support ebbed away from Somoza and toward the FSLN, beginning with universities, then the countryside (squatters and peasants), the working class, and ending with the middle- and upper-class. It came to encompass the majority of the population and bled into the international community.²⁴⁰ As Douglas Porch notes, there was a “near universal loathing for the Somoza dynasty, generalized across class, race, party, and countries in the region.”²⁴¹

As previously indicated, popular support for the Somoza regime was undermined by the popular perception that the Dictator allowed foreign interests to exploit the country’s people and resources. Also, the growing and irrefutable evidence that Somoza’s dictatorship committed crimes and acts of brutality against the Nicaraguan

²³⁸ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 275.

²³⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 233; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 246.

²⁴⁰ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 224; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 209, 214, 219–221, 232–235, 241–247.

²⁴¹ Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, 241.

populace, spearheaded by the National Guard, added to the overall discontent and deterioration of popular support.²⁴²

The Roman Catholic Church also contributed to the growing popular dissatisfaction with the Somoza government. The Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) opened the door to the ideas of “dependency” and its effects on the poor.²⁴³ The birth of *liberation theology*, which focused on the poor and not the rich, established an atmosphere that increased expectations among peasants in Central America.²⁴⁴ The “conscientization” that liberation theology established became a catalyst for revolutions.²⁴⁵ Moreover, priests and nuns began to publicly criticize the Somoza regime, led by a Roman Catholic bishop in Nicaragua who publicly condemned Somoza’s fraudulent actions during the 1964 elections.²⁴⁶ The knowledge that Somoza was living a luxurious lifestyle, while the population experienced high rates of unemployment (30 percent in 1979) and were in need of basic subsistence items contributed to the overall discontent. The aftermath of the 1972 earthquake, discussed above, was the last straw for many Nicaraguans,²⁴⁷ who nevertheless had to suffer the indignities of the Somoza’s National Guard, which post-1974 tortured and murdered Nicaraguans suspected of helping the FSLN.²⁴⁸ Concurrently, in 1974, the

²⁴² DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 15, 268.

²⁴³ Dependency theory, as defined by Walter LaFeber, is “the view that international capitalism had through a long process exploited Latin America and institutionalized poverty by making the continent dependent on foreign-controlled trade and investment.” LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 220.

²⁴⁴ Ibid; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243, 268; Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, 226.

²⁴⁵ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 220.

²⁴⁶ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243, 268; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 219–228.

²⁴⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243–244; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 144, 162; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 220; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 275–276.

²⁴⁸ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243.

aforementioned election fraud added to the increasing discontent toward the Somoza regime and increased support for the opposition.²⁴⁹

The domino effect continued against the Somoza regime when, in January of 1978, a disgruntled pro-Somoza business owner assassinated the famous editor of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. While Somoza was not directly responsible for his death, he was blamed for the murder and continued to lose public support. Shortly after, anti-Somoza protests brought more negative attention to the regime.²⁵⁰

Another blow to the regime's popular support was the successful seizure of the National Palace in August 1978. These actions were viewed as heroic due to the guerrilla's ability to make Somoza negotiate and cave-in to their demands. This in-turn increased support for the FSLN among the teenage population of Nicaragua. Spontaneous insurgent actions ballooned to their highest levels and FSLN recruitment was too high for the movement to absorb.²⁵¹

2. FSLN's Popular Support

The growth in dissatisfaction with the Somoza regime significantly contributed to the rise in support for the FSLN. In most of the examples above where the Somoza regime lost support, the FSLN concurrently became more popular. Popular support for the FSLN was very low during its inception because of the poor efforts of communicating their objective and purpose to the populace. As DeFronzo explains, "the FSLN in the 1960s [early days of the movement] was little more than a small group of highly committed radicals bent on armed revolution but lacking the enthusiastic support of the people, the only possible means of victory against a well-trained and well-equipped National Guard."²⁵²

²⁴⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228–229; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 157, 162; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 222; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 270–271.

²⁵⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244, 268; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 187; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 276.

²⁵¹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 245–246, 268.

²⁵² Ibid.

Although support for the movement began in universities, major growth in popular support for the FSLN came from the peasants in the countryside, who were the most socially and economically repressed in the population. The squatter population in the North-central Mountains provided a bulk of the active supporters.²⁵³ As previously noted, the FSLN's raid in December 1974 was one of the major sparks that magnified the movement's popular support.²⁵⁴ Jaime Wheelock, the leader of the Proletarian (*los Proletarios*) faction, noticed that:

By 1974 these great, oligarchic, economic groups were ready to share power with Somoza, but what happened was that Somoza did not wish it. Then at the same time we could raise the banner of national liberation and unite all the people. One didn't try to say "Well, it is class struggle." No! "It is a struggle for democracy and national liberation, against the Somocista dictatorship."²⁵⁵

From 1977, the FSLN realized that a more moderate message increased their support base and helped them gain the backing they needed to unite the majority of Nicaraguans against Somoza.²⁵⁶ By the end of 1978, the preponderance of news reporters realized the same trend in Nicaragua: "popular sentiment is overwhelmingly behind the Sandinistas."²⁵⁷ Furthermore, another example of the interlinked changeover of popular support between the Somoza regime and the FSLN was the movement's raid on the National Palace in August 1978. The success of this raid significantly boosted support for the FSLN, amplified the limitations of the regime, and motivated the populace to be active participants in the revolution.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 133, 214–215.

²⁵⁴ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 244.

²⁵⁵ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 263.

²⁵⁶ Ibid; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242.

²⁵⁷ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 273.

²⁵⁸ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 245–246, 268.

C. EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

Much like the Cuban Revolution, the United State was a continuous and significant external influence on the Nicaraguan Revolution. The US' early intervention (directly and indirectly) through occupation and persistent intrusion in Nicaragua's political structure set the foundation for the Somoza family dynasty.²⁵⁹ According to LaFeber, "the Somoza dynasty had been a subsidiary of the United States since 1936."²⁶⁰ It was also because of their intervention in the early twentieth century that the first Sandinista insurgents were created—under Augusto Sandino himself. During Sandino's insurgency, the United States established and trained the National Guard, who eventually helped the Somoza family dictatorship remain in power.²⁶¹

By the early 1960s, with the shadow of the successful Cuban Revolution (1959) and communism taking hold in the leftist governments of Guatemala and Cuba, the relationship between the United States and Latin America was at an all time low. On March 13, 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced his answer for improving Washington's relationship with Latin America—the Alliance for Progress. The ten-year, multibillion-dollar program was intended to "improve literacy, land use, industrial productivity, health, and education in Latin America."²⁶² Unfortunately, the Alliance for Progress had the opposite effect in Nicaragua.²⁶³ As LaFeber posited, "the Alliance was

²⁵⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 11, 28–29, 46–48, 64–68, 246; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 410–411; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 144, 153; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 218–219; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 264–265.

²⁶⁰ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 230.

²⁶¹ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 218–219; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 264–265; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 11, 28–29, 46–48, 64–68, 246; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 410–411; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 144, 153.

²⁶² History, "This Day in History (March 13, 1961): Kennedy Proposes Alliance for Progress," accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/kennedy-proposes-alliance-for-progress>.

²⁶³ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolution: The United States in Central America*, 163–164; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 212, 239; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 110.

inadvertently helping the Nicaraguans lose the capacity to feed themselves.”²⁶⁴ Worse, the program raised expectations without meeting them. It failed to deal with the root problem of poverty in Nicaragua, and enflamed the revolutionary spirit of Central America as a whole.²⁶⁵

Adding to the worsening situation, the oil crisis in the 1970s further contributed to the economic downturn in Nicaragua. Moreover, during the same decade, Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States and stressed a new form of foreign policy—a policy dedicated to human rights. President Carter’s new dedication to human rights gave him no choice but to address continuing concerns about Nicaragua’s National Guard human rights violations. The contradiction of pushing to protect human rights, while still providing \$2.5 million worth of arms to the National Guard in 1977, only enflamed the insurgent momentum.²⁶⁶

Towards the end of Somoza’s reign, the United States’ attempt to mediate a peaceful resolution to the conflict, persuade Somoza to liberalize, and keep the peace until the 1981 elections proved futile. Between the FSLN’s demands and Somoza’s intransigence, nothing worked.²⁶⁷ With no logical conclusion to the dilemma in Nicaragua, Washington pressured Somoza to leave the country, and cutoff military and economic aid to his government—a move viewed as the “final straw” or the “psychological shock” that ended Somoza’s dictatorship.²⁶⁸ By 1979, public knowledge of the U.S. position toward Somoza helped to spark more anti-Somoza sentiment in

²⁶⁴ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 163.

²⁶⁵ Ibid; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 212, 239; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 110.

²⁶⁶ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 204–205; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 128–130; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 225, 240, 244; U.S. Department of State, “A Short History of the Department of State: Carter's Foreign Policy,” accessed December 12, 2013, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/carter>.

²⁶⁷ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232–235; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 188–190; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 224, 230; Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, 241.

²⁶⁸ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 277.

Nicaragua and in the region, which advanced the already inevitable conclusion of the Revolution.²⁶⁹

The Roman Catholic Church, a persuasive external influence in Latin America, contributed to the decrease in popular support for Somoza and promoted class-warfare in Nicaragua that fit Carlos Fonseca's Marxist ideology and promoted the FSLN's cause.²⁷⁰ As noted by LaFeber, anti-Church pamphlets would appear in Central America with slogans such as, "Be a patriot! Kill a priest!"²⁷¹ The Nicaraguan archdiocese further promoted the anti-Somoza/National Guard feeling in the country, between 1975–1976, when priests testified to Congress about the Guard's atrocities and Nicaragua's archbishop issued a pastoral letter condemning Somoza's National Guard's brutalities.²⁷²

Another previously mentioned external factor was the 1972 earthquake. While the earthquake itself was not a direct cause of the pro-revolution sentiment in Nicaragua, Somoza's opportunistic corruption made this external event a critical downturn for the regime's popular support—principally among the middle- and upper-class. Theorists note this event as being a major catalyst to Somoza's demise.²⁷³

Neighboring countries also played a role in the success of the Nicaraguan Revolution. From the beginning, the FSLN founders used Honduras and Cuba as safe havens to launch their anti-Somoza operations. As the insurgency progressed and Somoza continued to lose support among his neighbors, many countries supported for insurgency. Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Mexico sent arms to the FSLN. Costa Rican President Jose Figueres allowed the FSLN to establish a government-in-exile

²⁶⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 232–235; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 188–190; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 244, 230.

²⁷⁰ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243, 268; Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, 226; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 219–228; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 254, 276; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 134–137.

²⁷¹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 222.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 14, 240, 243; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 227.

(Government for National Reconstruction, GNR) in San Jose to prepare for the transition of government near the end of the revolution. Figueres also facilitated the reunification of the three FSLN factions back under the *Terceristas*. Mexico contributed to Somoza's downfall by cutting off all relations with his regime and urging other nations to discontinue support as well, which led Brazil to follow suit. Cuba became a more active contributor to the Nicaraguan Revolution during the FSLN's final offensive in 1979 by sending 150 tons of munitions to the insurgents. Furthermore, on June 23, 1979, the OAS voted to demand Somoza's resignation and rejected U.S. President Carter's request of deploying OAS peacekeeping forces to Nicaragua.²⁷⁴

Lastly, much as in Cuba, the media contributed to the Nicaraguan Revolution by influencing both domestic and international support. While the domestic media, particularly *La Prensa*, was an active anti-Somoza voice piece for the opposition, the televised public killing of ABC newsman Bill Stewart by the National Guard amplified the media's effect on the revolution. This event magnified the atrocities of the Somoza regime to the international community, which contributed to a significant drop in transnational support for the government. This has been widely noted as a major event that left the United States no choice but to publicly denounce Somoza's government and withdraw support.²⁷⁵

D. MILITARY FACTORS

1. History of Military

During the early twentieth century, turmoil in Nicaragua caused the United States to deploy U.S. Marines to restore peace and ensure order. General Augusto Sandino, who did not approve of U.S. forces mediating in domestic problems, engaged U.S. Marines and established a support and operating base in the mountains along the

²⁷⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 216, 245–246; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 163, 232, 234–235; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 148, 190; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 230; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 130–134.

²⁷⁵ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 235; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 246.

Honduran border. During the 1920s, the United States established, trained, and equipped Nicaraguan forces to provide protection in Nicaragua and serve as a combined police and military force.²⁷⁶ This force was named the *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) and was established to “be loyal not to any one man or political party but to a democratic national constitution.”²⁷⁷ Jeffrey Paige eloquently summarized the origins of the National Guard by positing:

The National Guard, trained and initially paid and led by the United States, formed the core of a state that did not reflect the interests of the traditional landed oligarchy, the modernizing coffee bourgeoisie or even foreign capital. Its origins were strategic and military, not economic.²⁷⁸

The hope of a loyal and constitutionally faithful force was unfortunately condemned from the beginning when Anastasio Somoza Garcia was chosen to lead them. His use of the National Guard for personal ends and his *mafia* methods fostered a corrupt and unprofessional officers corps, whose attitudes were quickly reflected in the lower ranks. In January 1933, the Marines pulled out of Nicaragua, leaving the National Guard in control of the security in the nation. The following year, guardsmen assassinated General Sandino as he was leaving peace negotiations and scattered his forces.²⁷⁹

Throughout the Somoza family’s reign, the National Guard continued to be the regime’s faithful strong-arm and pillar of the government’s system of plunder. The corruption and brutality of the National Guard toward not only the political opposition but also against the general population contributed greatly to Somoza’s unpopularity. The privileges granted to the National Guard by Somoza isolated them from their fellow

²⁷⁶ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 65–68; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 236–237.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 264.

²⁷⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 65–68; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 236–237.

citizens.²⁸⁰ Somoza's use of the military was less about the protection of the country and more about "bleeding" Nicaragua of all its spoils.

2. Professionalism of Nicaraguan Military

Claribel Alegria and D.J. Flakoll argue that, "Somoza deliberately fostered military corruption to put enmity between the Guard and the public, and to create an officer corps in which the principal criterion for promotional success and personal enrichment was unconditional loyalty to 'El Jefe.'"²⁸¹ As noted, Somoza used the National Guard to buy or steal from all sectors of Nicaragua and allowed Guardsmen to do the same.²⁸² For instance, during the 1972 earthquake, the National Guard used their power to line the pockets of its leaders. While the Nicaraguan populace attempted to recover from the wreckage, National Guardsmen reportedly engaged in criminal activity, theft, and the sales of construction supplies provided by the international community. They also sold much needed medical supplies that arrived from non-profit international organizations. The obvious misuse of power in the case of the National Guard significantly contributed to the mistrust and growing criticism for the government.²⁸³

The hatred for the National Guard reached new heights during the state of siege from 1974 to 1977, which had been triggered by a successful FSLN home raid. The National Guard—the main instrument of state ruthlessness during the siege—carried out tortures and murders of hundreds of peasants believed to have been associated with the FSLN. They also attacked neighborhoods where FSLN support or presence was

²⁸⁰ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 156; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 242–246; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 69, 98–111; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 221; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 54, 90–93.

²⁸¹ Alegria, Claribel, Flakoll, D.J., *Nicaragua, La Revolución Sandinista: Una Crónica Política, 1855–1979* (México City, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1982), 125–126.

²⁸² Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 223.

²⁸³ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 243–244; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 144, 162; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 220; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 263, 269–270, 275–276; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 228; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 75.

allegedly highest, using planes, tanks, and artillery. Although the repression experienced a lull, in part as a response to President Carter's human rights campaign, it was reinvigorated again in 1978 by another successful FSLN attack—the seizure of the Legislative Palace. When the National Guard resumed their operations against the opposition and continued to make no distinction between guerrillas and citizens, the population began spontaneously resisting them.²⁸⁴

While from an outside perspective, the National Guard seemed to be a well-trained and effective force, in fact the corruption among the ranks along with distrust in society created an unprofessional and mistrusted institution that began to weaken from within. As human right violations mounted against the Somoza regime as a result of National Guard atrocities, both began to lose regional support.²⁸⁵ By August 1978, “there were widespread reports of large-scale desertions from the guard, although Somoza denied them.”²⁸⁶ In early 1979, the National Guard's institutional weakness began to catch up to them. They lost several cities to the growing FSLN force and resorted to more extreme measures—bombing cities, neighborhoods, and destroying homes, factories, and businesses. On June 20, 1979, the indiscriminate killing of civilians was elevated to the international realm when a National Guardsman killed ABC reporter Bill Stewart. The televised incident left President Carter no choice but to completely withdraw economic and military support for the Somoza government—a psychological blow to the regime, which further destroyed morale within the National Guard and boosted FSLN determination. This was compounded when the United States and other countries requested that Somoza step down in order to organize a peaceful

²⁸⁴ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 159; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 93–95.

²⁸⁵ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 269; DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246.

²⁸⁶ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 269.

transition of power.²⁸⁷ As noted by Jeff Goodwin, the National Guard had become “ineffectual and even counterproductive” in their actions against the opposition.²⁸⁸

By mid-July 1979, the morale, solidarity, and discipline in the National Guard reached its lowest point when Somoza fled to Miami.²⁸⁹ As Wickham-Crowley described, and comparable to the Cuban Revolution, “in many provincial outposts near the end, soldiers simply refused to fight, and low morale and desertion came regularly in the regime’s last several months.”²⁹⁰ A disintegrating National Guard force was soundly defeated by the FSLN. Their downfall was the final linchpin holding the lingering Somoza regime together. Once Managua—the capital—was occupied by FSLN forces, the last nail on the Somoza government’s “coffin” was hammered.²⁹¹

In sum, this chapter covered the specifics behind the leading causes that led to the triumph of the Nicaraguan Revolution. A focused historical analysis on the Sandinista revolution strengthened the hypothesis of this thesis by organizing the major contributing events along four main factors—leadership, popular support, external factors, and military impact. Somoza’s poor and *mafia*cratic leadership allowed the FSLN to gain the upper hand in the fight for popular support. External factors such as the intervention by the United States, the Roman Catholic Church, and neighboring countries also contributed to the domestic and international environment, which helped (directly and/or indirectly) the FSLN gain power in Nicaragua. Lastly, the employment of the National Guard for the personal benefit of the Somoza family, the lack of professionalism within the ranks, and the massive corruption and brutality that branded all Guardsmen significantly contributed to the growth in support and numbers of the FSLN and collapse

²⁸⁷ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 244–246; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 269.

²⁸⁸ Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 145.

²⁸⁹ LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 246; Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 58, 210, 263, 268; Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991*, 194; Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory*, 222; Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, 173, 180.

²⁹⁰ Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*, 277.

²⁹¹ DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 246.

of the regime. Towards the end of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the ineffective, demoralized, and institutionally weak National Guard could not contain the growing opposition, which resulted in the disintegration of both the state and its defenses. The simultaneous effects of these critical factors created an environment conducive to the revolution's success in Nicaragua and an end to the Somoza dynasty.

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VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to address the conundrum that, while both left and right shared the view that endemic social and economic inequality, combined with political exclusion to make Latin America a receptive environment for revolution in the cold war era, insurgencies succeeded in toppling incumbent governments there in only two instances. There are, of course, multiple and country-specific reasons for revolutionary failure. However, this thesis has sought to explain the two insurgent successes—those of Cuba in 1959 and Nicaragua two decades later. These exceptional insurgent successes flowed from: the confluent impacts of leadership (strategy); popular support (the ability of the insurgents to assemble a popular constituency for their message and program with concomitant erosion of support for the incumbent regime); external factors (degree of support in the international environment, in particular from the United States); and the ability of incumbent regime armed forces to fight off the often ill-organized, even amateurish in operational terms, challenges of these two insurgent movements. It underlines the fact that military efficiency is, after all, a relative concept.

This thesis has adopted the view that history if considered in a detached way can educate the minds of soldiers and policymakers to analyze conflicts in their historical context, while at the same time identifying the generic commonalities of success or failure. Theorists of revolution generally fall into five major categories of explanation—Marxist; frustration-aggression; systems theory; crises of modernization; and structural explanation. Those whose job it is to counter-revolutions may gravitate to the CIA's insurgent life cycle model, which this thesis sought to explain. But theory takes one only so far, so that an understanding of the historical background of both of these insurgent successes becomes critical to understanding the outcome. This thesis has sought to demonstrate why Batista in Cuba and Somoza in Nicaragua lost popular support through their policies and actions, and how the M-26-7 in Cuba and the FSLN in Nicaragua were able to take advantage of regime deficiencies and missteps.

This thesis has argued that the regimes of Batista and Somoza were unmitigated disasters in the contrast of modern democratic states able to deliver services to their

population, protect them against subversion, and be accountable through a modern democratic process for the outcome. This thesis has identified as a failure of leadership each regime's inability or unwillingness to reform which led over time to their weakening and ultimate downfall. Concomitantly, the ability of revolutionary leaders to structure their organizations, through democratic outreach, for the purpose of appeasing important disgruntled and alienated social groups and military efficiency—taking advantage of their opponents' weaknesses—must also count as a leadership strength. In many respects, leadership like military efficiency is a relative term. Castro was a romantic and narcissist who twice previously had failed to precipitate revolution in Cuba. However, from 1957 if not before, Batista's poor leadership allowed Castro and his M-26-7 to organize an opportunistic campaign crowned ultimately with success, one gained largely because the Cuban military had become so corrupt and demoralized under Batista that it proved unable to protect an unpopular and delegitimized regime from an insurgent group under opportunistic yet charismatic leaders. As a result, the repressive, corrupt and unprofessional Cuban armed forces that attempted to rout the M-26-7 guerrillas were swiftly defeated, which sealed the fate of Batista's regime and produced the triumph of what was to become a Castro family dynasty.

Substituting Somoza for Batista, the Nicaraguan Revolution followed a similar but more tortured trajectory. Anastasio Somoza Debayle's corrupt and brutal leadership almost makes Batista appear to have been a benign despot. Nevertheless, the ability of multiple FSLN leaders—Carlos Fonseca, Daniel and Humberto Ortega, and Eden Pastora—to take advantage of Somoza's considerable shortcomings was hardly foreordained. On the contrary, it took time for Somoza's craven use of Nicaragua's finite resources for personal gain to allow for anti-Somoza sentiment to flourish and to increase overall opposition toward the regime. In both cases, the erosion of middle class support, including the military, for the regime that proved critical. In other words, a popular peasant base for revolution as embraced by theorists of revolution, while necessary, is insufficient. This shift in popular support was also mirrored in the international community, which eventually withdrew support for Somoza's government and even promoted FSLN objectives—the removal of Somoza and the National Guard from power

in Nicaragua. Much like the Cuban army, Nicaragua's National Guard was deeply detested by the Nicaraguan populace for their corruption, repression, and overall aloofness to society. As in Cuba, a prolonged campaign against their own population in support of an obviously corrupt dictator undermined the morale and institutional strength of the National Guard. Poor morale caused in great part by its disconnection from its social base translated into a lack of discipline that contributed to the complete disintegration of the Somoza regime and rise of the FSLN.

Of course, all insurgencies are unique, as are the circumstances of their success or failure. Cuba in 1959 and Nicaragua in 1979 are hardly Afghanistan, Iraq, or Columbia (to name but a few) in our modern era. The contribution of this thesis has been to identify certain characteristics of two successful examples of insurgency to better understand some critical factors that may aid in analyzing revolutionary outcomes. While this thesis focused on two successful Latin American revolutions, further research is required to reach a deeper understanding of current insurgencies worldwide in regards to the four major factors presented here (leadership, popular support, external factors, and military). These four interrelated factors also offer a method of studying insurgent events, which can provide insight and a basic foundation to apply strategic, operational, and tactical COIN techniques.

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